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ANNE SEABURY

by

CAROLINE STETSON ALLEN

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To

Eliza Orne White

"O, came you by the same road too,
The road that called to me?"

JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY.

"As I write the snow lies thick upon the branches of the trees, upon the lawns. Here, within, the fire leaps brightly in its iron cage."

OLD KENSINGTON.

FOREWORD

We forget, sometimes, that the world will go on being faced by the "Modern Generation," as it has been faced by it since the world began. Most of us would not go back to the Old Generation if we could, but as we progress it would seem foolish not to take counsel of experience and not to hold fast to the eternal verities.

Our times are not out of joint; there is no real dislocation, but some of us feel that many of Time's joints are becoming a little wobbly and out of "true." "Anne Seabury" helps to tighten them, to bring them into line, to make them more serviceable.

Miss Allen has written a delightful story. Her characters have individualities which are engaging. We are grateful that this is not a "problem" novel, for of late the "problem" novel has become a weariness. It is not a "so-they-lived-happily-ever-afterwards" novel. It is refreshingly a story of simple vivid lives lived in an Anglo-Saxon New England town. These lives adjust themselves with varying success to the exigencies that every life must meet. Sadness is there surely, but beyond sadness, if bitterness can be denied, there lies great happiness. Anne finds this happiness, and those who learn how she found it will be comforted and may well be made happy. If the purpose of the story is to mobilize the courage of facing hard circumstance by the discovery of real life values, the purpose has been fulfilled.

ROBERT B. OSGOOD.

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CHAPTER I

MOUNTAIN LAUREL

"Do you call Anne Seabury pretty?" said Susan Halliday. "Why, it never occurred to me to think her pretty, though she's nice looking, and interesting, and all that."

"Why, yes, I call her more than pretty. I always like to watch her face. Her eyes are such a deep blue, and her expression always changing."

"I saw your rapt gaze in the Shakespeare class yesterday. Was that how you lost your place?" asked Mary Hale.

"Probably," answered Jessie Dewey. "Hush! She's coming up the path."

The knot of Academy girls made an attractive group as they waited in the wide shade of an elm for the last bell to summon the pupils indoors. The Academy was in a small village of New Hampshire called Hillstead, and was a low, unpretentious wooden building, painted white with green blinds.

From the road in front the schoolhouse could hardly be seen, so screened was it by the pines and birches, and the big elm hard by the door.

In early summer—it was now mid-June—this section of the country was worth coming miles to see, for on three sides stretched wide fields, rosy or snowy white with mountain laurel. The woods, too, were thickly carpeted

with it, so that the lovely glow, tempered by drifting white, met one's eyes on all sides. In later years the city people discovered the laurel, and came in motors to ravage the country, but at this period the picture stood as God painted it.

A tiny sprig of the pink laurel in its cluster of glossy deep green leaves was in Anne Seabury's hand as she came up the path. She stepped quickly, fearing to be late. In the shade of the trees Anne's hair looked blacker than ever. Her eyes were as blue as fringed gentians. Opinion varied as to her beauty, because her features were in no way remarkable, and at times, when unmoved, she was plain. But if touched by some inward glow of feeling, the sensitive lines of her face took on a winning loveliness. The June day promised to be hot, and Anne wore an untrimmed dress of white cotton, scattered over with tiny green shamrock leaves.

"Who's been picking laurel?" demanded Susan in mock reproach. "I thought we were told to leave it alone."

"Spare my life!" laughed Anne. "I was going past Jabez Gleason's farm, and I guess he saw me looking at his fields—oh, they are the loveliest!—sheets of rose-color!—for he came up to the wall, and told me to take all I wanted. He says he's been trying for the last two years to root it out of the soil, because the cows will eat the leaves, and it poisons them badly."

"All hail to farmer Gleason's kine!" said Mary. "Why didn't you take more?"

"No time," replied Anne, "but we can get some after school."

The bell now ringing, the girls filed into the schoolroom, where the other pupils had already gathered.

There were about forty pupils, quite evenly divided as to boys and girls. The boys in particular wore today a look of secret excitement and expectation. The new teacher, a slight, quiet-looking young man in the early twenties, had been with them only a week, and trouble was brewing. On taking the school, Mr. Moores had been warned by the committee that he would undoubtedly meet difficulty in managing one of the senior class, John Morton. No teacher as yet had been able to hold his own with this troublesome overgrown lad, and as John was considerably larger and heavier than Mr. Moores, there were serious misgivings as to any better condition.

Anne liked the new teacher, and frowned slightly as she took her seat, and saw the cause of the boys' ill-restrained laughter.—The front wall of the schoolroom was covered with blackboard, and directly in the center of this stood in bold outlines a ridiculous caricature of Mr. Moores.

A few of the girls were tittering behind their handkerchiefs, and the air of the room was that of a highly interesting event about to come off. Anne glanced a little anxiously at the teacher, who looked somewhat pale, but otherwise undisturbed; and he opened the school, as usual, with singing by the pupils, and a prayer, followed by reading. Anne accompanied the song at the piano.

Anne loved this opening period of the school hours. Today the poem was one of Browning's—

"Home Thoughts from Abroad."

"O, to be in England, now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf,
Round the elmtree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch rings in the orchard bough,
In England—now!

"And after April when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds and all the swallows,
Hark, where my blossomed peartree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dew-drops at the bent spray's edge!
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture.

"And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide makes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower,
Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower."

As Mr. Moores read the last two lines he gave a quick smile to one of the younger girls in the front row. She had today brought him the bunch of buttercups that stood in a blue mug upon his desk.

Then he put down the book of poems, and turned alertly to the school.

"Before you take up the history lesson, I want to call your attention to the drawing upon the blackboard."—Here he reached for the pointer, and a smothered laugh came from John Morton. "For," continued Mr. Moores, "while there are some defects, which I will presently point out, there is also a degree of talent shown which makes the picture worth our study."

Bewilderment grew on the pupils' faces. Was the row to be a fizzle, after all? What was the new chap up to?

Mr. Moores took the drawing line by line, feature by feature—praising here, criticizing there, while astonished silence held the room. At last, glancing at the clock, he said: "Well, I see we have no further time to spare just now, but I ask the boy or girl who made this picture to stay a few moments after school."

Still in electrified quiet, the history class formed in line. Curious glances were turned upon John, whose look was one of sullen chagrin. Today's lesson had to do with ancient Greece, and Mr. Moores, who had lately visited that country, made the lesson particularly interesting.

School over, John Morton remained at his desk, his arms folded, a defiant frown on his face.

The teacher waited until no lingering footsteps outside could be heard, and every boy and girl had vanished down the winding road, then he sat down on the desk next to John's, and to the boy's intense astonishment, burst into a hearty laugh.

"You got my nose all right!" said he. Then he sobered down.

"Who taught you to draw?" he asked.

"Nobody."

"Would you like to take lessons? Or rather take lessons you must. The talent is there without a doubt."

A magical change passed over the boy's surly face, then the eager look died out.

"No money for that," he mumbled. "Dad has a rotten time getting along as it is. This is my last year."

Mr. Moores was thoughtful. Then: "I go in for a bit

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of painting myself," said he. "Not that I'm an artist, yet I believe I could really help you. I studied a year under M——— in Rome. Can you spare me forty minutes every other afternoon, at the close of school?"

"You bet!" cried John. "I mean"—he flushed, and grew embarrassed—, "thank you very much sir!"

"That's settled then," and Mr. Moores rose, smiling cheerfully on the boy. He looked at his watch. "I must go! I've an engagement."

"I'll lock up if you want, sir," offered John eagerly.

"All right. Thank you. I shall just get there!" And away went Mr. Moores, his light step presently breaking into a run.

After closing and locking the windows, John stood stock-still by the teacher's desk. "What do you know about that?" said he.

Just then, on the floor under Anne Seabury's desk, where it had slipped from her dress, he noticed the little sprig of laurel. John picked it up, and put it in the mug with the buttercups. That, however, didn't satisfy him. After rummaging about, he found in a cupboard, a small green vase for the laurel, filled it with fresh water and placed it on the other end of the desk beside the little volume of verse. "Well, I *am* surprised!" he said, and started for home.

Henceforth rows in the Academy were a back number.

CHAPTER II

FOOTPATHS

There were two paths leading from the Academy to Shadow Lake, a favorite spot for school picnics. The path Anne Seabury always chose wound through still and fragrant woods, where one trod softly on smooth pine needles and velvety green mosses. About half-way to the lake, a sprightly stream sprang across the path, tempting one to turn aside to follow where it should lead; but if you let it go its truant way, the brook laughingly relented, and joined you again just before the lake was gained. It was many years since bears had roamed these woods, but the steel-blue bearberries which they used to devour still grew along the path. In their season the partridge-berries lent a pretty touch of red here and there to the ground.

With many of the pupils the other path was better liked. It kept beside the main road, and not only passed the homes of a number of them, but gave the boys a view of the ball field, and a chance to replenish their pockets with goodies at the one village store. These paths reached the lake at nearly the same point.

Anne Seabury looked forward with mixed feelings to the day of the school picnic. One of the older boys, Dick Allison, had this term rather haunted her footsteps. She felt for him—what she felt she was hardly able to define, even to herself; but the jocose remarks of the other girls

were almost unbearable, making her shut herself into a more impenetrable reserve.

Dick decidedly preferred the path leading through the village, but today chose the woodpath, since it was there he could be near Anne. It wasn't easy to get her to talk only with him, but he had a masterful way of his own, so that when Bill Holbrook asked Anne some innocent question, edging himself between her and Dick, he found himself neatly tripped up and left in the rear.

"Where did the laurel come from I saw on Moores' desk?" asked Dick.

"I'm sure I don't know" replied Anne, brushing aside a protruding branch.

"You don't?" queried Dick, with a surprised glance at her quiet features.

"Why should I?" said Anne. "I dare say his small worshiper, Polly Ware, put it there. I know she supplies him with buttercups."

"Oh!" said Dick, all interest in the subject gone—"Say —here's a wild rose—first one I've seen."

He picked the rose, and put it into Anne's hand, laughing slightly to see the color flood into her cheeks.

"She's different from the other girls," he commented inwardly.

Anne trembled a little and looked back to see if Daisy Morse had noticed Dick's proffer of the rose. To her relief, Daisy was deep in conversation with John Morton.

"Old Moores is all right!" John was saying. "Blest if he isn't the corkiest feller I ever struck. Took me Saturday into the W— Art Museum, and introduced me

to the chap who has charge of the Greek ornaments. He showed me all over the lot."

"Yes, I like Mr. Moores," said Daisy. "I guess we all do. Who would have guessed from his looks that he had so much in him! It comes out more all the time."

"I heard dad say," joined in Susan Halliday, "that the School Committee is awfully surprised at the way he takes hold of things. They had found out he knew a pile—he won a traveling scholarship at Yale—, but they didn't imagine he had—I don't know what to call it—"

"Grit!" said John.

"Personal charm," added Susan.

"Can I walk home with you tonight?" asked Dick of Anne.

"I don't know," she replied confused. "I suppose we'll all come back together."

"I rather think we don't come 'all together,'" said Dick. "Say, Anne, why do you always take this path? The other's a better one by far. There's nothing to see in this old wood but trees, and who wants to see trees?"

"Oh, I think this one ever so much pleasanter," replied Anne. "It is so cool and shady. And you must admit it smells good! This is where I get balsam for pillows. Stop! Listen! That's a hermit thrush."

Dick contrived that he and Anne should leave the picnic ground a little after the rest had started for home. And through that summer, in spite of his preference for the main road, the woodpath often found him by her side.

Dick was nineteen, and emotionally younger than Anne, who was seventeen. When not with her, he promptly forgot all about her in various active pursuits. But to

Anne things came with more force, and left their impress accordingly. Indeed the natures of boy and girl were not unlike the two footpaths, the one matter-of-fact, and bare of imagination, the other, with countless half-hidden beauties, and a charm kept for the few who chose to seek it out.

Those were happy school years. Mr. Moores joined in all the sports, and in the schoolroom put zest and reality into every lesson.

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may." All too soon came the winter after Dick's graduation, when he was to leave for a business college in Pennsylvania.

Anne had agreed to spend with Dick his last evening in Hillstead, and that afternoon rejoiced to see that the sky was clearing after a final snow flurry, and that the sleighing promised to be better than ever. Chaperones were undreamed of in the little hill town, and when as they sat together, Anne playing stray snatches at times on the piano, Mrs. Seabury asked, "How do you and Dick propose passing the evening?" she offered no objection when Anne replied, "Dick has a new sleigh he's rather proud of, and I think we'll try it tonight. The roads look just right."

"You'd better wear your old gray coat," advised her mother.

"Oh, mother!" protested Anne, "my new brown is so pretty!"

"Yes, I know, but not half as thick. However, you can wear my quilted jacket underneath and I'll put in a stone bottle of hot water for your feet. The mercury's dropping."

"Oh, mother!" again protested Anne, "he'll think me an old fuss!"

"And do you care so much what Dick thinks?" asked Mrs. Seabury somewhat wistfully.

Anne's only answer was the deeper red in her cheeks. She went over to the window which faced the white road, and stood for a few moments watching the sleighs dash by.

"I do love the sleighbells!" she said. "They are the most Christmasy sound I know." She added to herself, "And, oh, it won't be very long before he comes back for his Christmas vacation."

Mrs. Seabury had been taking the last stitches in a hat of blue, and she now showed it to Anne for her approval. The hat was charming, fitting closely to the head, and edged around with a thick band of soft brown fur. Anne was delighted, and her resolve to wear the brown coat was strengthened.

Why must the last of my good time or dear experience be shadowed by sadness? There are not a great many things that I envy little children, for I believe truer, deeper satisfactions and happiness are ours with advancing years. But this one thing I do at times wish that I could get back—the ability to take each happening just by itself, without so much as a glance backward or forward.

When Dick, at half past seven, came springing up the steps, and Anne went to open the front door, her face was grave, and the hand he took for a moment in his was colder than his own.

As Anne looked at Dick she thought that she had never seen him look so handsome. His brown eyes sparkled, and his cheeks testified to the biting air.

"No, thank you, Mrs. Seabury," said he, "I won't come in if Anne is all ready. Gypsy doesn't seem anxious to stand still. Don't bring any shawls. I've got two thick fur robes out there."

The horse did indeed appear to be on the point of dashing off with no driver, so they hurried down the steps.

Dick got into the sleigh beside Anne, and tucked one of the robes snugly about her, letting his arm rest for a moment around her waist as he did so. He was in one of his liveliest moods, and as he let out the reins, and they sped smoothly over the road, Anne welcomed his flow of words, for she couldn't talk. The more she resolved not to let Dick's last evening leave him with dull memories, the closer were her lips sealed. After awhile he turned to look at his silent companion.

"What's up, Anne?" said he, "I haven't made you sore about anything, have I?"

"Of course not," said Anne, rousing herself. "Aren't we going almost too fast? There must be a limit even to Gypsy's powers."

"I let her set her own pace at first. She'll slow up, after a bit. Say, Anne, are you going to miss a fellow?"

There was a choking sensation in Anne's throat. She turned her head to look at the flying fields. But her voice sounded cold as she answered. "I shall be very busy, and so will you, but I shall miss seeing you."

"Is that all you have to say! Girls are queer—" moodily.

"I don't know what you want me to say. Have you got all the things you need for your room?" with a brisk change of tone. Anne's spirits were lifting. He did care!

"I don't care what I have. Yes, mother has made a barrel or so of pillows and stuff. A letter from you is what I'd like best to see in my room. You must write three times a week. Will you?"

"I think that is too often," said Anne, but smiling happily. "I will promise to write every other week, Dick, and I'll save up all the village news."

" 'Every other week' indeed, Miss," exclaimed Dick. "I said three times a week and I'm not sure but I'll make it every day."

"The price of notepaper has risen," said Anne teasingly. "But, seriously, I believe every other week is often enough, and you will find it so when you get fully into things."

"I won't write at all unless you say three times a week."

"I shall be sorry not to hear from you." This was said sweetly.

Dick's face wore a baffled look, and nothing was said for a quarter of a mile. Anne stole a shy look at him. Suddenly he drew her close to his side, and kissed her passionately.

The two were in reality in different worlds at this moment. Dick was having a very good time, and experienced a certain thrill in for the first time kissing this extremely pretty girl. There was a pride, too, in finding that she did not withdraw from his caress.

But to Anne, in the space of one supreme moment, the world had changed. If they might but fly on forever in this sparkling air, through happy moon-kissed fields!

Never had the stars shone so brightly. The air was positively sweet. The drifts on either side of their road might have been heaps of white roses.

"Dick," she said unsteadily, "you will forget all about me." But she said it happily, with no belief in her own words, and the blue hat just touched his rough sleeve and was withdrawn.

"Don't you worry about that, little girl," said Dick softly.

CHAPTER III

TRIX

Trix Faxon (her real name was Beatrice) was studying geometry. At least she thought that was what she was doing, but her younger sister Judith, who was with great care drawing a map, complained that Trix kept jumping up and joggling the table.

Beatrice and Judith were not the only ones busy at the little center table, for the Faxons were a large family, and winter evenings usually saw them seated as now, father engrossed in his daily paper, mother working her way through a high-piled basket of mending, small Kitty blissfully dressing paper dolls, and the others—Trix, George, Henrietta, and Judith—preparing their lessons for next day.

The younger children strongly resembled their mother, with her dark coloring, and strong, pleasant, plain face. Mr. Faxon was also dark. But Trix was of a different type, and favored her aunt Beatrice Adams, for whom she was named. Her hair was light and curly, her eyes a sparkling blue, and there was a dimple in each pink cheek.

Trix felt these winter evenings a decided bore, and to-night could scarcely restrain her restlessness.

"There comes a sleigh! I wonder who's in it?" she said, running to the window, and pulling up the shade.

"You'll never get your lesson at this rate," said Mrs. Faxon.

"Can't help it, I must see who's taking a ride. Don't I wish I was having one! Oh, I can see as plain as day! It's Dick Allison and—yes—sure as I live—Anne Seabury. What it is that fascinates Dick in that girl? I've a mind to cut her out!"

"Shut up!" growled George. "I can never get this list of kings."

"That's not the way to speak to your sister," admonished Mr. Faxon. "Draw down the shade, Beatrice! You're letting in quite a draught." He sneezed as he spoke, as if to emphasize his words.

"I felt sure you had a cold coming on, Thomas," said his wife. "The church was as cold as a barn last Sunday, and it's a wonder we haven't all got one."

"Great Scott!" cried George, "I'm going to study in the kitchen."

"Guess you won't find it any quieter there," laughed Beatrice. "Jake Holden's visiting with Norah."

She moved back to the table as she spoke, and took up her geometry with a sigh. Silence again held the room. But Trix's mind was far from the problem of her book. The sight of the speeding sleigh, with its enviable occupants awoke a fierce desire to be outside this dull domestic circle. "Happy Anne!" she thought. She glanced at the tall clock in the corner. It was half-past eight. The town library would be open for another hour. Anything to get out of the house.

"I'm going down to the library for awhile," she announced. "Want your book renewed, Retta?"

"Yes, thanks," said Henrietta. "It's on the dining room table."

"Don't stay long, dear," said her mother.

"All right; but I may stop a little while at Jane's. I promised to show her that new collar pattern."

Trix could be heard getting her coat and hat from the hall closet, then came a few minutes' pause, when they rightly guessed her to be patting stray curls into place before the small mirror.

The front door closed.

"What'll you bet she forgot to take your book?" asked George.

Henrietta at once flew to look.

"She didn't take it," she said, disappointedly, on returning from the next room. "Now I'll have a fine."

Mrs. Faxon sighed. Of late Beatrice had become less and less dependable.

Trix meanwhile was making her way briskly toward the village. There was a bright moon, and the white-blanketed houses, trees and fences stood out distinctly.

"If I know Mrs. Seabury," thought Trix, "she'll expect Anne to be in the house by half-past nine, and if I stay at the library till then, ten to one, I meet Dick after he's left her, and he gives me a ride home."

Which was exactly what happened. At twenty-five minutes past nine Trix left the steps of the little red brick building, and started slowly toward home, two books of popular fiction under her arm. Hardly had she entered the more secluded road that branched from the main village street and led to the Faxon's house, when she recognized Dick's new sleigh.

"Hullo, Dick!" she cried, as he drew alongside. "Quite a sleigh you have there! Only it looks rather empty. What do you mean, young man, by tearing around alone, in a sleigh like that?"

Dick laughed and checked the horse. "So you approve of my new sleigh, do you? Get in, and try it. You on your way home? I'll turn around."

"Oh, you don't need to do that," said Trix, showing her dimples and stepping briskly in beside him.

"It is early," said Dick, "Gypsy has plenty of go in her still. What do you say to a drive to the Point and back?"

"That suits me all right," said Trix.

She snuggled down contentedly in the warm folds of the robe, placing her library books at her feet.

"Well, so you're going to leave us, Dick," she said with a little sigh. "I suppose Anne Seabury will be heart-broken. Or rather, I don't quite think so." She laughed, a provoking little laugh.

"Now, what do you mean by that remark, young lady?" asked Dick, scowling a little.

"Oh, I spoke without thinking, which is a very rash thing to do. I only meant—well, I don't think Anne has such awfully strong feelings about anything, do you? She takes life calmly, and I'm sure she's very lucky to be able to do so."

"Anne's all right," said Dick gruffly.

"Oh, of course! You don't understand me at all. But you ask the other girls. They all call her cold."

An uncomfortable pause followed. Then Trix skillfully changed the subject. They talked of the party that

was to come off New Year's Eve. She offered to knit a silk tie for him before then. After they had turned at the Point, they drove more slowly. Trix was a mighty good sort, thought Dick, and with plenty of pep in her. Now if Anne only had a little more pep! But Anne was all right, of course.

"Excuse me, Trix, what did you say?"

"Nothing of any importance," stiffly. "I suppose you were thinking of Anne."

Dick laughed, edged a little closer to the girl, and began to talk of college matters. He got no reply.

"What's the matter, Trix?" he asked, bending to look into her face. He didn't remember ever noticing before how pretty she was. One of her soft curls had loosened, and brushed against his cheek. Where was the harm in having a little flirtation on this his last night at home? . . . Just before the Faxon gate was reached—was it Trix's doing or his? he never could remember—their lips met. Then before he could say a word, she had slipped from the sleigh, and hurried into the house.

At that moment Anne was sitting by the window in her bedroom. She had undressed, and put on her thick blue dressing gown. This was her very own night, when Dick had first kissed her! A kiss was a sacred thing, meaning more than words. In reality, though he was too young to speak of marriage, they now belonged to each other. That was why the garden beneath her window lay bathed in such white radiance; why the dark cedar stretched arms that trembled with silver icicles. How hard it was to let him go! But no, nothing could be hard now. Oh, how she would work. Dick should find, when

he came back, that she had not stayed still the months that separated them.

Her mother opened the door. "My child! I hoped you were in bed long ago."

"It is lovely here by the window, mother!"

"You won't think it quite so 'lovely' tomorrow, if you catch cold sitting in that draught. Did you enjoy your ride?"

"Oh, yes! It was just the night for a sleighride."

Her mother drew a little nearer and paused, with a hand on the footboard of Anne's bed.

"I hope you realize that Dick is no longer a mere boy," she said.

Anne was silent.

"He's been coming around often lately."

She paused, but as no reply was forthcoming, went on, "Your father thought I ought to speak to you. He says you probably don't realize...A girl often takes such a thing less to heart...It wouldn't be fair to Dick..."

She stopped, silenced by the beautiful trustful look on Anne's face, as she turned it toward her in the moonlight.

"Don't worry, mother," she said very low, "you don't need to worry."

Commonplace words; and yet Mrs. Seabury felt an unwonted difference in Anne, as if in her young joy and strength she stood for something stable and no more to be questioned than the peace that lay upon the dreaming landscape.

CHAPTER IV

MISUNDERSTANDING

When Anne awoke next day it was with a sense of joy that flooded her whole being. The world—the beautiful blue and white shining world—was hers to do with what she would! The housework no longer seemed humdrum. Mrs. Seabury could hear her singing as she swept the snow from the front porch, and her own heart lightened. "After all, she doesn't mind Dick's going away. It has only been a boy-and-girl affair of their school days. Her father and I made too much of it."

But to Anne everything had a new, more significant setting. There was something in the happy gentleness of her voice as she spoke to the postman that made him turn to look at her.

"Two letters for Mrs.—one for Mr.—" he volunteered. "Too soon for your letter, Miss Anne," and Anne, though she colored and had no ready reply, was not wholly displeased.

Her letter came promptly next day, and was all that her heart could desire. It was eight pages long, and full of affection and confidence.

"I'm writing on the train," he said, "so my pencil makes a pretty good map of the hills we rode over last night. Anne, it doesn't seem as if it was only last night we had that sleighride, it feels like a month ago! I won't

forget it though, will you? especially..." and here the beautiful color flooded Anne's cheeks. Having read the letter, she read it again, then sat holding it close, while she relived every moment of their ride and of their parting. Her first impulse was to sit down and pour out her flooding heart in return; but on reflection it seemed better to wait a few days, even though it would be hard to do so. She would keep to what she had told Dick, and write to him once a fortnight, but oh! it should be a letter to redeem the waiting! Only to satisfy her own craving for communication, the letter should be commenced, and a few lines written every day.

"Dear Dick," she wrote—"Thank you for letting me hear so soon. I wish you could see Hillstead this morning. It looks like Fairyland, for it snowed again in the night, and then turned to rain. Toward morning the mercury dropped twenty degrees, and now every tree is glistening with ice. Dr. Haydon's barn looks like a silver palace. I wonder if you have as beautiful things to look upon...." When she tried to say how she missed him, a choking feeling came, and the words refused to be written.

Dick felt a little disappointed when he read the letter. Anne was the finest girl in the world. Yes, he knew that very well. But what did he care to hear about Dr. Haydon's barn? He had a mind to write to Trix—not a long letter of course, by no means eight pages, just a friendly note to see what she would say in return. That could wait, however. There was no hurry; and he had the dean to see, and all sorts of minor matters to settle.

But when he got back to his college room, after calling

on Deacon Rogers, there lay a little square pink envelope on the mat just inside his door. The address was in unfamiliar writing, but bore the Hillstead postmark. The missive, to his surprise, was from Trix.

"Dear Dick:" it began, "You will think it queer of me to write to you, but I got to thinking how lonesome you must be way off there, so I thought I'd let you know there's one person at home who's missing you, and who isn't ashamed to say so. Oh, Dick, I wish we were taking that sleighride to the Point! Mother was hopping mad at my getting home so late, but I told her you can't be young but once. Don't forget the talk we had coming back. And don't forget—you know what! There doesn't seem to be any news yet to tell you. I haven't seen any friend of yours since you left. Oh yes, I did meet Anne Seabury this morning down in the village. She was walking with a man, too, but I couldn't make out who it was." (Trix knew very well it was Anne's father.) "She seemed to be feeling very gay. I'm beginning to look forward to Christmas time, and the New Year party, etc., etc."

Dick threw down the letter, and took Anne's from his pocket to read again. Then he reread that from Trix, and a little hard look crept into his face. Here now was a girl who was thinking of nobody's barn or cowpen, but of him. Here was a letter to warm a chap all through. Write to Trix? Of course he would! And there needn't be any "every other week" about it, either. My! he wished he had a photograph of the girl. He felt pretty sure she'd let him have one; whereas Anne, when he had asked for hers, had said: "You don't want my picture.

You'll be seeing me again in such a little while. Besides, I haven't any."

"Have one taken for me," Dick had urged, but she had only laughed a little, and changed the subject.

Before he knew it, Dick had covered ten pages with his rather sprawling handwriting, and in due time Trix had the satisfaction of knowing that a correspondence with him was well under way.

My readers have seen enough of Anne and Trix to be able to guess how matters went after that. Dick's letters to Anne came at first a little uncertainly but still fairly regular; and she made every allowance for any irregularity, indeed rejoicing in the evident signs that college work was absorbing. "I can wait," she thought, "I want him to do his level best, and make the most of every minute." So, though her heart sank a bit, when, as the year wore on, his letters became shorter and more infrequent, she still carefully shut the door on any feeling of distrust.

One morning, on her way home from some errands in the village, she heard a hurrying step behind her, and presently Jessie Dewey was walking beside her. Jessie looked very red and excited, and plunged at once into what she had to say.

"Anne, I s'pose it's 'horrid' of me to tell you this, but you've got to look out for that Faxon girl. She's after Dick Allison for all she's worth." Here she stopped, as much out of breath as if she had been running. It wasn't easy to say this to reticent Anne, for whom she had always had a secret and profound admiration. Glancing at her friend now, she could read nothing from her expression,

and it was in a colorless voice that Anne replied: "I don't see why you think that should affect me. Even if it's so."

"But Anne," said Jessie wonderingly, "why, Anne... I thought...why, Anne...."

"How are the plans for the party getting on? You're on the decoration committee, aren't you?" asked Anne, her tone expressing lively interest. But, turning at the same time to look at her companion, she realized that Jessie was hurt. At these words about Trix a cold hand seemed laid on her heart, yet she was too proud to let Jessie see. But now she yielded to the girl's friendliness.

"Jessie," she said in a low voice, "it's nice, anyway, to know you care about what happens to me. Only I can't bear to talk about it. I know I'm queer. But you won't, will you? Trix is a very pretty, jolly girl, and of course Dick enjoys her. Who wouldn't?"

Susan Halliday joining them just then, the subject was dropped, but as Jessie left them at her own gate, she whispered, "Anne, you're wonderful!"

When Anne reached home, she went right up into her own room, and locked the door. As she lay in tearless misery on her bed, the battle she fought was a hard one; but in half an hour she came downstairs, able to go about her usual morning work, and to answer her mother in a cheery voice. She just wouldn't doubt Dick, that was all there was about it. But how necessary it was to keep busy, every moment through the day!

Toward the end of the afternoon, tired from her activities, but craving the fresh air, she slipped on her coat and hat, and walked along the road back of the house that led to fields and woods. The sun had set, but left

a golden glow that spread far around the horizon, and brightened each opening between the somber trees.

Along the roadside stood thickly the pretty frosted ferns, like a border of fine-drawn lace. Two barberry bushes stood like ladies in waiting in their white draperies, bending to curtsy as Anne passed. The beauty and the stillness alike contributed to ease the girl's heart. She sat for a few minutes on a rock, within the little wood, watching the fading light, and letting the cold air, that whispered of ice-clad spruce and pine, cool her feverish cheeks.

When she stepped out from among the trees it was to see a young lady dressed in gray walking along the road in the direction she herself was about to go. The young lady paused, and they looked at each another, and in that brief glance Miss Gwendolen Westerly saw that the girl was unhappy, while Anne found something strangely sweet and comforting in the eyes fixed so steadily on hers.

"May I walk beside you as we are bound the same way?" asked Miss Westerly.

"Yes, indeed," said Anne. They walked along together without words. Then, "What a lovely quiet!" said Miss Westerly. "It feels as if some kind hand were hushing the earth to sleep and bidding it forget all its troubles. And see! There is the new moon, like a candle left lighted by a nurse, so the little feverish world won't be discouraged as the dark creeps on."

Her voice was exquisite. Suddenly a horrible feeling came over Anne—a certainty that she was about to cry. With it was an agonizing sense of shame and mortification. She could not speak, and the tears that all day had

been kept back would have their way. She stopped in the road, and held her hands to her face, her figure shaken with sobs.

Miss Westerly, who was taller than Anne, put an arm closely about her, so that the girl's head rested against the gray fur of her shoulder. She said: "I'm awfully sorry, no matter what it is. I'm sure you'd rather I went on, but I'll be only a few steps ahead. Good-night." And then so softly withdrew her arm and walked on.

At the moment Anne felt only intense relief at being left by herself. But later, when in bed, her last waking thought was of a voice full of protecting tenderness—a voice that promised her world should not be left in the dark. And through the window opposite her narrow bed she could see the soft blue coverlet of the sky, quilted with lovely stars.

CHAPTER V

A FRIEND IN NEED

Next morning, right after breakfast, when Anne was sweeping the piazza, Miss Gwendolen Westerly came up the steps. Anne's face grew crimson as she murmured "Good morning" and took Miss Westerly's outstretched hand.

"I've come to make what you will think an odd request," said Miss Westerly. "No, I can't come in, thank you. Up in my attic stands the scarlet sled I used as a girl. I haven't given it a thought for years—to my shame be it said; someone might have been using it all this time. Today, when I looked out of my window, and saw the wonderful crust on the hill back of our house, I felt about ten years old again, and ached for a coast once more. Will you come? a little later, at about half-past ten?" And she smiled in a most friendly fashion. Then, at the puzzle in Anne's face, she laughed. "But, dear me! You hardly know who I am, much less where I live. I'm your minister's sister, come to keep house for him, and you know where the parsonage stands—not the old one, the new one, close by the church."

"Yes, I know," said Anne. "And I'd like so much to come!" she added.

"How pretty she is when she smiles," thought her new friend. Then: "I'll expect you at half-past ten." And

Miss Westerly went briskly down the road again, leaving Anne in a little flutter of excitement. Already the cloud of depression was lessening, and at the same time her confidence in Dick's good faith returning. His letters were certainly shorter than at first, and more and more infrequent, but that might easily be accounted for by the increasing claims of his studies. Ought she, of all others, be the one to let him neglect them, just that she might have more letters? She went in to her mother with a bright face, and told her of Miss Westerly's invitation.

Promptly at half-past ten Anne walked up the straight path—a hedge on either side—that led to the parsonage door. The house, though newly built, was on old colonial lines, with three dormer windows, and a dark green door with brass knocker.

A neat white-capped little maid answered her timid knock, giving an added touch of prettiness, as she stood framed in the green doorway in her crisp dress of pink- and white striped cotton and snowy apron.

Anne stepped so quietly into the parlor, that her entrance was unheard by the occupants of the next room, Mr. Westerly, his sister, and their nephew Bobby, a boy of six. At first Anne could not imagine what they were doing, there was such laughter and commotion. The next moment the tall young minister pranced into the parlor at the end of a long line of scarlet reins held lightly by the child, who at the top of his voice urged on his lively steed.

Miss Westerly stepped smilingly after them, and was the first to see their visitor seated near the door at the far end of the room. She hastened her steps, and wel-

comed the girl cordially. The prancing horse was instantly transformed into a dignified gentleman blushing to his ears, while Bobby dropping the reins sidled up to his uncle and stared somewhat resentfully at this untimely interloper.

Laughter played in Anne's eyes, though her features were grave.

"You have a splendid hill for coasting," she said, glancing from the window toward the gleaming slope.

"Uncle Hugh can't coast now," said the little boy, firmly.

"You see what a strenuous life I lead!" laughed Mr. Westerly, taking a chair beside Anne, and lifting Bobby into his lap. "I hope Mrs. Seabury is well."

"Yes, thank you," said Anne.

"I'll have my things on in a jiffy," said Miss Westerly. "Hugh, can you spare time from your labors to bring down my old sled from the attic?"

Bobby looked doubtfully from his aunt to his uncle and then at his new reins with their silvery bells.

"You can have your turn when you get back, Auntie Gwen," he said, as he ran toward the stairs after his uncle's long stride.

"You'll think we have a very spoiled young man here," said Miss Westerly, when she returned in her gray fur coat and small gray hat. Anne saw that her eyes were gray with a hint of blue. The face was one to be remembered, with its look of strength and a certain elusive charm.—Was it gayety? thought Anne, or humor? or no, was it a sure kindliness? She recalled herself with a start,

as Miss Westerly buttoned the last button, and drew on a pair of gray mittens.

Mr. Westerly and Bobby saw them off from the side door, and the coasters presently found themselves at the top of the sparkling ice slope.

"Now, isn't this glorious!" exclaimed Miss Westerly. "Shall we take turns? Or no—the sled is so long I believe it will hold us both. I'll steer and you shall sit in elegant leisure behind."

Oh, that swift exultant flight, through air that was a mixture of frost and sunbeams! Anne's cheeks were red and tingling when at the foot of the hill they jumped off the sled. They took the rope together, and dragged the sled again to the top.

"Won't the little boy come out?" asked Anne, for she was fond of children, and had hated to leave him behind.

"He's sure to turn up before long," replied Miss Westerly, and even as she spoke, a flash of scarlet, like a tanager, was seen circling the field nearest the house and approaching the hill. Anne was delighted.

"Bobby is a treasure," said Miss Westerly. "He came to us last week, and I think at first missed his sisters dreadfully, though they're only two years old. I've begun to think we'll keep him the rest of the winter."

"Twins!" said Anne. "What are their names?"

"Dorothea and Theodora. Bobby thinks one name would do for both, if they keep on looking exactly alike."

The slide down the hill was even more delightful with Bobby in scarlet cap, sweater and leggings tucked in between them. Anne kept a grasp on the small sweater, while Bobby's chubby arms went as far as they could

around his aunt's waist. Once, going over a "thank-you-ma'am," all three were turned off the sled, which kept merrily on by itself down the hill. Bobby laughed uproariously at this mishap.

Mr. Westerly forgot that he ought to be writing his sermon for next day, as he stood looking out of the study window. What a picture it was!—the shining hill against a dark background of pines and hemlocks, and the lively trio with their scarlet sled. How straight that girl stood! He had often noticed her face in his congregation, so full of thought and varying expression. But he had never seen her quite so charming as now, every movement full of vigor and enjoyment. He was strongly tempted to join the coasters, but remembered the number of pages still to be written, and turned back to his desk, on which lay the contemplated part of his sermon.

An hour later he heard the coasters returning. Miss Westerly took Anne up to her own room where an open fire was cozily crackling. The room was furnished all in blue, with a most alluring blue-sprigged chintz sofa in front of the fire. A row of yellow primroses in pots stood in the wide window seat. Low bookcases were built into the wall on each side of the fireplace, and several of Anne's favorite volumes peeped out at her as if to say: "Here we are to greet you." She knelt down in front of one of the cases. "Oh, you have Old Kensington!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, don't you love it?" said Miss Westerly. "But do take off your things, and try my sofa. Here comes Katy with something that smells good. Katy, you angel! how could you guess how hungry we'd be?"

The smiling maid set down her tray upon which steamed two cups of chicken broth. There was an old-fashioned blue plate, too, piled with hot buttered muffins. They ate the little luncheon before the fire, talking about books meanwhile. Then Miss Westerly got out some gray knitting from a closet, and went to sit by the window, leaving Anne on the sofa. All this time no syllable had passed between them of the evening before. And now that there was every chance for speaking confidentially, Anne felt shy and became silent. The room, except for the clicking of the knitting needles, and the falling asunder of a rosy log, might have been uninhabited.

A delicious drowsiness threatened to overpower the girl. She rose abruptly, and said she must go. Miss Westerly, too, felt a sort of embarrassed shyness, but she took Anne's hand in hers and said in her voice that was like music, "Please let me see you sometimes." Anne's lips trembled. She returned the pressure of the hand, but then turned away without speaking.

Downstairs in the study Hugh Westerly was making idle strokes with his pen on the margins of a sheet of manuscript.

"What is that story all about?" asked Bobby, climbing up into his lap.

"About different kinds of honesty," said the minister absently.

Bobby regarded the pen's progress with interest. "I can tell all those letters!" he said proudly: "Does A-N-N-E spell Honesty? What is Honesty? Why does it have to have two N's?"

Then they heard Anne speaking in the hall. "I've had a beautiful time, Miss Westerly," she said. And then came a rush of cold air as the front door opened. To Bobby's indignation, he found himself instantly dropped on the floor. In three strides his uncle was in the hall, and in three more out of the house. He caught up with Anne before she reached the gate.

"I've been meaning to call on your mother, Miss Seabury," he said, a trifle breathlessly. "Is she likely to be at leisure this morning?"

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW YEAR PARTY

The two meetings with Gwendolen Westerly helped Anne very much through the succeeding weeks. Her influence was like reviving mountain air on the girl's drooping spirits. She had been so friendly, with a delicate tact that made all she said and did acceptable. Indeed her tact amounted to a real gift of her own, just as if she had had a leaning toward music or painting. Almost everyone who came in touch with her felt its grateful influence. And this quality in particular made her an untold help to her brother in parish matters. Hugh was her junior by several years; in fact, he was so young that there had been question as to his appointment. But he was much liked, and by the children as well as their parents, and his sermons, though not brilliant, had a genuine satisfying quality that promised well for his future.

A few people called Gwendolen Westerly too proud. They said she bore herself like a princess. But to others like Anne her erect carriage and the way she held her head ("like a lovely rose on its straight stem," Anne said to her mother) were but added charms; and many who at first resented what they called her aristocratic bearing, learned in some time of trouble to bless her coming step.

As it turned out, Anne saw very little of her that winter. She was loath to encroach on the time of a person

of so many duties and widespread interests. And Miss Westerly, besides a keen wish to further her brother's interests in every possible way, had a great many friends and acquaintances in adjoining towns, who were continually driving over to see her, sometimes carrying her off for the afternoon or over night. She was a careful housekeeper, and had also temporarily the care of her lively little nephew.

How it happened Anne hardly knew, but Dick's letters came less and less often, finally ceasing altogether. Even then she tried to bolster up her confidence in him, to believe that coming examinations took all his time. She tried bravely to enter just as before into all her day's routine. But she grew a little pale, and her cheerfulness,—for she did for the most part continue to appear in good spirits—more and more forced.

And now Dick had come home, and it was the night of the New Year Party. Mrs. Seabury went up into Anne's room after supper to help her dress. The girl looked very sweet as she came downstairs in her soft floating white, with a narrow girdle of gentian blue about her waist, and a white rose tucked in her black hair. Anne's hair was so dark as to look black by night.

In the little village of Hillstead everyone turned out, the old as well as the young, whenever there was a party or any festive occasion. Anne had hardly known whether to expect Dick to call for her tonight. She was quite used, however, to starting forth between her father and mother, and finally did so, after a few pretexts for lingering.

On reaching the hall, they found many of the older

folks seated around the sides of the wide hall preparatory to watching the games. Anne slipped off her outer garments in the dressing room, and joined Susan Halliday, Jessie Dewey and Mary Hale at one end of the hall. They were exclaiming over the prettiness of the new curtains of deep blue bordered with pale yellow. The window sills were heaped with holly, and garlands of evergreen adorned the walls. It all looked very gay and Christmasy to Dick Allison, who now entered the hall.

Anne saw him, and her heart stood still for a moment. He saw her, too, and was moving uncertainly toward the group of girls, when Trix Faxon, enticingly dressed in pink silk, advanced quickly to meet him.

"Welcome home, Dick!" she exclaimed. "It is good to see you! Come, sit right over here with me. I've a thousand things to ask you about! The most important is, how long can you stay home?"

As Trix talked she led the way to a seat somewhat removed from the other young people, beneath an arch of hemlock; and Dick followed, quite dazzled by the pink silk and the light bobbing curls. Wasn't Anne's dress rather a schoolgirlish affair? He would go and speak to her presently, but now—

"What do you care how long I stay home?" he asked Trix softly, as he settled down beside her.

"I'll speak to Anne later," thought Dick. But very soon he was so deeply engaged in talk with his partner that his intention was forgotten.

Anne, who had been talking with John Morton, now sat alone, her cheeks burning, and with a firm resolve not to let anyone guess that Dick's neglect was anything to

her. Was Jessie Dewey watching her? If only she might go home! And now Dick and Trix crossed the hall, and sat not far from Anne. As yet he had not spoken one word of greeting, although on sitting down he had nodded to her.

The color now receded from Anne's cheeks. It seemed to her as if she were turning to stone. Wasn't the hall growing very close? Why were the windows all closed? How far away the voices sounded! She leaned against the wall. Oh, she mustn't feel faint, of all things.

Someone came quickly, and stood in front of her, in such a way as to shield her from sight. "My dear," a voice said, "smell of this. Now another! There—take my arm. We will go into the dressing room. It is only a step. An arm was placed firmly about Anne's waist. Everything whirled about them. The next she knew she was lying on a wooden settee, a gray cloak under her, with Miss Westerly sitting close by rubbing her hands, into which blood presently rushed back, tingling.

Anne felt horribly ashamed. And yet—how sweet—how dear—was the kind face above her! She closed her eyes again. "Just lie quiet. No one shall come in," said Miss Westerly. She tucked the fur coat about Anne's feet, and smoothed her hair gently. The window, slightly opened, let in a reviving breath. In a little while Anne felt nearly herself again. Girlish voices were presently heard near the door, and someone on the other side was turning the handle, and about to enter the room.

Miss Westerly stepped forward, and opening the door the merest crack, said, "Don't come in just now, please." Then in a clearer tone, "I have a bad headache, and Miss

Seabury is kind enough to say she will go home with me. Will you, Jessie, ask my brother to have the carriage brought now, at once, without any delay? Thank you. No, you are very good. Miss Seabury is right here with me."

"It's perfectly true," she said to Anne after the door was closed. "I've had a horrible headache all day, and really shouldn't have come. Now we can go together. Won't you spend the night with me?—but you can decide after we start."

They passed down a back stairway to the street.

"My mother—" began Anne.

"To be sure! how stupid I am. Let me put you comfortably in the carriage, then I'll go back and speak with her."

"You are so kind! But I'm sure I'd better go home."

"It shall be exactly as you like best. Wait for me a few minutes."

Almost immediately she returned, Mrs. Seabury hurrying ahead to make sure that Anne was all right. Anne laughed away all her mother's fears, saying she felt all right now that she was in the fresh air; and Mrs. Seabury, who greatly enjoyed these gala occasions, was finally persuaded to return to the hall, since she left Anne in such capable hands.

As soon as her mother was out of sight, Anne sank back on the soft cushions. Miss Westerly arranged them more comfortably, and tucked her fur robe about Anne as if she were a baby.

"My, how glad I am to escape from that hall!" she

said. "If you don't mind we won't speak a word until we get home, on account of my head."

But she took Anne's hand in hers. A stream of comfort and refreshment seemed to pass to the girl through that strong clasp, and the sense of an infinite near kindness.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said as they neared her own home.

"And you'll come home with me?" asked Gwendolen Westerly gently.

"I think I'd better not. But—" her voice choked.

"Ah, I understand, my dear," said Miss Westerly. "Patrick (to the driver), stop at Miss Seabury's—the next house but one, on the left."

* * *

And so came the end of Anne's first romance. The effects of such a bitter trial were mixed.

Not a word in relation to it passed between her and her new friend, but Miss Westerly divined the facts and admired the pluck which made a persistent effort to meet as usual the demand of every day. The courage thus exercised could only grow. On the other hand, Anne, never prone to think highly of herself, had—at least temporarily—lost a little faith in her friends. She was afraid to let herself love them overmuch; a haunting terror of impending loss barred the way to deeper intimacies. At the end of three years, the name Gwendolen Westerly was to Anne but the seal to a gracious memory. With all Miss Westerly's force of character and inborn cheerfulness, she, too, was reserved. She kept hoping to see more of Anne. But it was hard to get sufficient

domestic help in the little country town, and both led busy home lives. Hugh Westerly sometimes met Anne. Occasionally on Sundays he walked home with her after the Sunday school service.

Anne now played regularly for the singing in Sunday school. She had had few lessons, but her touch was beautiful.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE WOOD

Anne was now twenty-three years old. She believed that she still loved Dick Allison, but in reality her trust had been too rudely shaken for her present feeling about him to bear any semblance to that first passionate devotion. Jessie Dewey was her most intimate companion, but not even to Jessie had she ever talked about Dick. Both girls knew he was supposed to be engaged to Trix Faxon. Anne wondered at her own composure on hearing this rumor, but the bitterness of that first disillusionment three years ago made anything that followed trivial, and the only hope she allowed herself was that, when married, Dick and Trix should not make their home in Hillstead.

On a bright October afternoon Anne, strolling in the wood, came upon Bobby Westerly so busily engaged in filling his bursting pockets with chestnuts that he didn't look up at her approach.

"Hello, Bobby!" said Anne. "What a splendid lot of chestnuts! Look at that squirrel!—there—right over your head! He means to see you don't take too many!"

Bobby paused to watch the indignant gray squirrel, then set busily to work again whacking with all his might at one of the well-laden limbs of the tree.

"You take some, too," Bobby said. "They are awful good."

"Thank you," said Anne, "I will take a few home to boil. I like them best that way, don't you?"

"I like 'em any old way," said Bobby, putting one in his mouth. "Auntie Gwen likes them roasted. I'm going to roast them for her after supper. We're going to pop corn, too."

"How are the twins?" asked Anne.

"If and But? They fight like anything," said Bobby.

"I hope they're very well."

"Oh, they're well enough. If's the strongest. She can knock But over every time. But's the prettiest. Her hair curls," he added impartially.

The air was like wine this afternoon, with a frosty glint that made one feel winter was coming soon. The leaves fluttered gayly in the sunshine. They brightened the floor of the wood with their graceful whirling, like children that know bedtime is not far away, and play as hard as they can before the dread hour strikes. On a sudden impulse, Anne seized the little boy's hand and drew him to his feet.

"Come, Bobby!" she cried. And Bobby, nothing loath, they flew up and down the path and whirled about as gayly as the leaves that rose and made a red and yellow scarf to fly about them. Anne's cheeks were like roses.

She paused to fasten a strand of black hair that had become loosened. The child regarded her with admiration.

"My Miss Anne!" he said. "You know how to play!"

"So she does," said a familiar voice, and turning, they saw Hugh Westerly coming along the path. He walked slowly, because a twin tugged at either hand. They

floundered along somewhat like two bobbing little boats beside a tall steamer.

"If they play, me wants to," said the taller twin.

"But you can't. Babies can't!" said she of the curly locks.

"If I wants to, I can."

"But how can you?" asked the other.

Dorothea immediately dropped her uncle's hand, and starting to show how, tumbled down.

"You kids can't skip!" said Bobby, witheringly. But he picked his small sister up and kept one of her hands in his, while Mr. Westerly dried her eyes with his own handkerchief and soothed her cries.

"Did they walk away over here?" exclaimed Anne in astonishment.

"Oh, no!" laughed Mr. Westerly, "Gwendolen had to go to the Blake farm for eggs, and gave a general invitation to the family to drive over with her. When we reached the woods, the babies clamored to get out. She will stop for them on her way back in about half an hour."

The twins gazed solemnly at Anne. She smiled back, and seating herself on the fallen trunk of a tree, began to improvise a doll from twigs and bits of moss and evergreen. A small scarlet leaf implied a gay apron, fastened with a pine needle.

Dorothea and Theodora slowly drew nearer.

"If she lets us have it, I want it," said Dorothea firmly.

"But it's for me!" wailed Theodora, her small mouth drooping.

Anne hastily started to fashion a second doll.

"Of course there shall be two," she said, at which the twins beamed. "Now, what shall their names be?"

"Pat-Rick and Han-Nay," said If, thinking of her two devoted slaves at home.

"They're both girls!" said Bobby scornfully. "Patrick isn't a girl's name."

"If I wants it for her it is," said Dorothea.

"Well, you can name one, and But can name the other," said Anne. "And now let's build a nice little house for them to live in. Shall it be here, right under this tree, where the moss is so soft and green?"

Hugh Westerly had climbed up into the Chestnut tree, and now to Bobby's joy sent down a great shower of ripe nuts.

Miss Westerly found a very contented little party, when she appeared to bear off the twins. She offered to drive Anne home, but Anne had come out meaning to pass a longer time in the wood, so she declined. She bade good-bye to them all, but at the last moment, after seeing the rest settled in the carryall, Hugh turned back.

Anne had reseated herself on the fallen log. The light had grown suddenly dimmer, as it does in a room when the shade is lowered. Hugh came and stood beside Anne. She continued to sit in thoughtful silence, for when with him she felt the same sort of ease and naturalness that made a part of the charm of any intercourse with his sister. She turned to him with a sudden impulse.

"Mr. Westerly, this world is so dear and beautiful. And then—"

" 'And then'?" he said, as she didn't go on.

"There comes, just as you are so happy, the certainty and dread of death. How ought one to think of it?"

Mr. Westerly didn't answer for a moment, and when he spoke it was a little diffidently.

"'They only are wise who know that they know nothing,'" he said. "Your feeling is one shared by almost everyone, I imagine. I have told myself that the only way is to take it as one does a difficult college examination—keep the mind fresh and clear up to the last moment, concentrate on other things, and then it all comes easier than one had expected, and the puzzling questions find answers at the right time. But I mustn't preach."

"Do say what you feel. It helps."

"Help comes in different ways to each one of us. Personally, beauty such as we are now in the midst of, holds more to awaken trust than any mere preaching. Sometimes I get completely discouraged, when I think how very little sermons amount to."

Hugh liked it that Anne made no rejoinder to this. She never flattered him. Neither spoke for a few moments. The clear call of a chickadee came to them, and was echoed farther away. A gray squirrel sprang daringly across the path.

"I had a twin sister," said Hugh. "She died before she was twenty. It was cancer."

Anne started and gave a sign of pity. She had never heard of this sister.

"The way she met death was the finest thing I've ever seen. It is impossible to describe. In all her months of feebleness and awful suffering she held life—life

eternal—and held it to the very threshold of the Other World—so that one saw in fact it never really left her. Her death was only a supremely brave step in life. When she laid down that bright flag of courage and marvelous cheerfulness, it was for us, in our way so far short of hers, to 'carry on.' "

"Oh, I thank you," said Anne fervently.

"I never talked of her before to anyone. Her doctor, a great surgeon, wrote to me of her, 'She had the qualities for which the men yearn.' "

"Just to know of such courage helps," said Anne softly.

Hugh Westerly having at last begun to speak of this precious sister, found great relief in unburdening his heart. And so interested was Anne that it was at last with surprise that she saw how dusk had fallen upon them. Hugh walked with her as far as her door.

But even at this hour the little road was not entirely deserted. A young couple was walking along the narrow path, so engrossed in talk that they gave no heed to the slender new moon and the mellow beauties of the October evening.

Dick Allison, a handsomer young man than when we last met him, and Beatrice Faxon, who had changed but little in the last few years, walked rapidly; and Trix's voice was raised rather shrilly, while Dick's, in a lower note, was surly.

"Go back to your old Anne Seabury if you think her so altogether lovely!" said Trix.

"You know well enough she wouldn't have me back. And I never said I wanted her. You're the greatest one

for twisting 'round everything a fellow says. The truth is, Trix, you're forever scrapping, and the time will come when you'll quarrel with me once too often."

" 'Scrapping'! You do use elegant English. I guess Anne at least hears a different kind of talk from her present devoted."

"Who's her 'present devoted'?"

"Don't you wish you knew? Someone who can't keep his eyes off her."

"I'm sure I don't know or care who it is. Say, Trix, it doesn't look to me much as if we were just engaged, the way we're talking now."

"Well," said Trix, for her ill-temper was evaporating a little, "suppose we make up."

CHAPTER VIII

JUDITH PROTESTS

"I'm glad I don't love him. He would never care for me." That was what Anne was thinking as she stood at her window looking out upon the wintry road. Presently she saw two figures coming around the turn of the road, and she flushed slightly and turned away from the window, for one of the walkers, was the subject of her thoughts. Hugh Westerly's glance was bent on his companion, and his hearty laugh, in response to something Trix said, reached Anne in her room. Hugh had overtaken Beatrice on her way to the same parish meeting for which he was bound.

"Have you heard the great news about Mr. Moores?" asked Trix, as they passed the Seabury house.

"No," replied Mr. Westerly. "Good news, I hope."

"Well, rather! He's come into a big fortune left him by an uncle in England."

"That is, indeed, good news. But I hope it won't mean we must lose him from Hillstead."

"No, I'm not sure whether he's going to keep on with the Academy, but anyway's he's to stay on in Hillstead. They say he's already planning wonderful things to do for the town." On a sudden mischievous impulse she added, "Of course, we can guess what holds him here."

Hugh Westerly looked at her questioningly. "What is that?"

"Well, it's beginning to dawn on him what others have seen for a long time," said Trix, "that a certain young lady in Hillstead admires him very much."

The curious rejoinder she expected to this not forthcoming, she presently went on.

"Of course you know I mean Anne Seabury."

Hugh involuntarily stood still, but at once walking on, said: "Moores is a tremendously fine chap, the right stuff through and through."

"She thinks so," said Trix, who had never before in her life thought of Anne in connection with the teacher. "And of course, if he falls in love with her, it will be a splendid thing for her—his money and all."

"A splendid thing for him as well," replied Hugh. "But since nothing has been said as yet—by the way, Miss Faxon, what a charming girl Miss Seabury is!"

"Yes," said Trix, a little hesitatingly, "she has a lot of outer charms. Sometimes I have been afraid—" Again she waited for the reply that didn't come, and had to somewhat lamely proceed.

"Sometimes there seems something lacking in her. She —well, I don't know—she's cold, and the cold person is often the selfish person, don't you think so, Mr. Westerly?" she asked sweetly, showing her dimples.

"Miss Seabury is the last person I could associate with selfishness, Miss Faxon. Ah, I see Judge Harding wishes to speak with me. Good morning!"

They were now opposite the little church where the meeting was to be held, and he lifted his hat as he spoke.

Trix could see that she had vexed Mr. Westerly, but in spite of his forbidding expression she hoped she had placed an entering wedge that might prevent his continuing to pay attention to Anne. Her desires were rather hazy, even in her own mind. It was certainly unpleasant to see another girl the object of too much attention. Also she would decidedly enjoy arousing Dick's jealousy, if only some of that surplus energy could be diverted to herself. She meant to be true to Dick. He was smart. He was sure to make money. She felt fairly confident of being in time able to attract Mr. Westerly, if she did her best. "I've never failed yet," she thought complacently. What a triumph it would be if a second time she could cut out Anne. She little guessed the aversion with which she herself was already regarded by him.

That evening there was a sociable in the church parlors. The women of the parish met in the afternoon to sew, and were joined at supper time by the men. The supper was very informal, and served at separate tables holding four or six persons. The young girls of the parish waited on their elders, and wore pretty white aprons for the occasion.

But I must go back a few hours. Trix was sitting in her room that afternoon, looking over bits of finery and planning just what to wear to the sociable, when her door burst open, and her sister Judith dashed in and stood before her, her usually placid face flaming with anger. "You've just got to stop it, Trix Faxon!" she cried, stamping her foot. "I'm ashamed to have you for a sister!"

Trix was too utterly astonished at this sudden onslaught

to feel for the moment any other emotion, and gazed with round blue eyes at the small fury before her.

"I don't know what on earth you're talking about," she said.

"Yes, you do, too!" You just do know what I'm talking about, you horrid thing."

"Now you just get right straight out of my room!" said Trix, but Judith didn't budge, and her high indignant voice went on as if her sister had not spoken.

"How do you suppose I feel—how do you suppose Retta feels—when all the girls talk about you, and say how you cut out Anne Seabury, and now you're going to get Mr. Westerly away from her? Yes, you are!—You told Mary Hale you were going to—so there! If you do, if you go near him, I'll do something you'll be sorry for! You just look out, Beatrice Faxon. Anne Seabury's the nicest person in this town! You mean, mean thing, you!"

She ended in a burst of tears, and her crying could be heard as she fled to her own room, the door of which she shut with a bang.

Trix immediately ran after her. "You impudent little thing!" she said loudly, as she opened Judith's door, "don't you ever dare to speak to me in that way again! Just you remember it's not any of your business—"

"Girls, girls!" remonstrated their mother, hurrying up the stairs. "What has come over you? I can't have such talk as this. Tell me at once what the matter is."

Judith, furious though she was, never told tales, and was indeed now crying too hard to be able to speak.

"You ought to lock this imp in her room for the day,"

cried Trix hotly. "She's been saying the horridest things!"

Mrs. Faxon looked doubtfully from one to the other. "I'm afraid you vexed her some way, Trix," she said, "but I can't have this quarreling going on. Don't let me hear any more of it." And the busy mother hastened back to her task downstairs.

Anne felt lighter-hearted than for a long time, as she walked to the church that afternoon. Every care seemed to have taken wings, and had Bobby Westerly appeared on her path, I think she would have been ready for another frolic then and there. On joining the women and older girls in the church parlor, they found her a little more ready to talk with them than usual. There was a happy light in her dark blue eyes as she questioned Mrs. Monroe about her little girl's lameness, and afterward as she sat listening to a prolonged tale of woe from Mrs. Coolidge about her cook's misdemeanors. Once in a while, as the afternoon wore on, her eyes sought the door. At half-past five the hungry men of the community made their appearance by twos and threes. When the minister walked in, Anne was absorbed in what Mrs. Coolidge was saying.

"And she stayed out till when?" asked Anne.

"Till quarter to twelve, quarter to twelve, if you'll believe me," said Mrs. Coolidge impressively. "Oh, here's the minister. Good evening, Mr. Westerly."

He stayed but a moment. He must make the rounds of the room; but his eyes had met Anne's smilingly, and as he walked away she still felt the strong pressure of his hand. "Yes, till quarter to twelve," went on Mrs.

Coolidge, "and when she came in, I said to her, said I—"

Having dutifully circled the room, and spoken to every parishioner present, Hugh Westerly's glance again sought Anne's corner. Just then Mr. Moores moved in her direction, as if intending to join her, and with a queer little sense of chill Hugh remembered Beatrice Faxon's words of the morning. If there was any truth in what the girl had said, at least he mustn't stand in Anne's way. Moores was the finest chap in the world— So Hugh, instead of crossing over to Anne's side, found Susan Halliday, and from where they sat could see Mr. Moores presently engaged in spirited conversation with the girl. A few minutes later Trix came up, and seated herself on the other side of Susan. In the midst of the chatter she at once began, Susan fell silent, and after awhile with some murmured apology, moved away to one of the tea tables where Jessie Dewey sat in charge of an enormous silver urn. Trix seated herself a little nearer the minister, who returned her greeting rather constrainedly.

"It takes you men to wake things up," said Trix. "You don't catch me coming around in the middle of the afternoon again—it's something deadly with only women to stare at one another. Look at Anne Seabury over there! It takes the schoolmaster to make her open her lips. I couldn't get a word out of her today. It's queer about her. She can't talk with one of her old classmates, but let a man come around—oh, my!"

"Have you seen the new portrait of Dr. Ellery?" asked Hugh. Dr. Ellery was his immediate predecessor, and

his portrait had just been presented by his family to the church.

"No, it's in the other room, isn't it? I'd like to see it," replied Trix, rising invitingly.

They examined the portrait in detail, and it was while they were thus occupied that Judith spied them from the doorway.

After their return to the other room, Hugh went back to stand again alone before the portrait. It was painted by an artist then only beginning to be known, but afterward famous, and there was something strongly attractive to the young minister in the lifelike and expressive features of his predecessor. The eyes shone with benevolence and truth.

While thus standing, a small dark-haired figure, attired in a brown frock, approached him, and stood by his side with an air of determination.

"How do you do, Judith?" said Hugh. "Isn't this a beautiful face?"

"No, sir, I don't care for it very 'specially," said the small girl. "I don't like large noses very much."

She then turned red, noticing that Mr. Westerly's nose was not small. Then, gathering her courage, she said:

"Don't like Trix as well as Miss Anne Seabury," she said.

"What did you say?" asked Hugh in amazement, and glancing rather nervously around, as he saw some ladies approaching.

Judith wondered if he were deaf, and, raising her voice, she said:

"Don't like my sister. Miss Seabury is lots nicer."

"Judith," said Hugh, "I believe there is another portrait you may be more interested in at the other end of the room."

And as the ladies advanced, he retreated rapidly, Judith following close at his heels.

"Miss Anne is truly lots nicer," she reiterated, in a still louder voice.

"My dear little girl, we never talk about ladies in public," said Hugh.

"Oh!" said Judith. "Well, I know a place that's not public, back of the church in the horse sheds."

She fixed appealing eyes on him. They went thither.

Judith talked to him very fast, lest her courage wane. She even poured into his astonished ears what Trix had said to Mary Hale as to "cutting out" Anne.

"Your sister was only joking," said Hugh. "I see you take things very much to heart. There isn't anything for you to bother your little head about. Come in, and have some ice cream with me."

Judith's eyes sparkled.

"Thank you, sir. I s'pose the supper's only for grown-ups, though," she said. "My family don't know I've come. I'm the only young one here," she added despondently.

"Ah, think what an honor for me!" he said, taking her hand. And presently Judith felt herself in fairyland. For they sat at a small table set for two, with gay red paper roses in the middle, and were waited on assiduously by the young ladies, who flew to execute the minister's orders. Besides, could not the little girl see Trix's eyes fixed angrily upon them from across the hall? That added zest to every mouthful. Moreover, when the ice cream

was eaten, Mr. Westerly instantly ordered another for her just as firm, as cold, as pink, as the first.

At the end of the evening, when Anne started for home, she had gone but a few steps along the road, when a tall form emerged from the shadow and fell into step beside her.

"Such a night makes it seem a sin to go indoors," said Hugh Westerly. "Do you feel like taking the longer road home?"

Anne's reply came after a little pause. "Why, yes," she said.

CHAPTER IX

RENUNCIATION

The winter day had been dreary, with lowering clouds, and threatened rain or possibly snow, but at about half-past four a change came. Like a sulky child, consenting at last to try to be pleasant, the dark clouds parted and slowly drifted away, while a deep rose color grew and spread along the western horizon. The sun looked smilingly forth.

It was four days after the sociable. As Hugh Westerly stood in the window of his study watching the sky's transformation, there was a smiling glow in his heart that corresponded to the happy change without. His thoughts were of Anne; but they were as delicate and as void of absolute shape as the drifting clouds. He wondered if she had enjoyed their walk home from the church as much as he had. How sweet her voice had sounded when she bade him good-night. But how shy! She was shy. And yet how completely they met in some of the brief talks they had had in the last half year! What blue flower was like Anne's eyes? There was a flower—not the forget-me-not—that was too light. Perhaps the dark, purpled blue of certain pansies . . .

The doorbell rang, and Hugh turned away from the window. Mr. Moores was ushered into the room.

"I've had some very good news of you," said Mr.

Westerly when the guest was seated, "and I am glad of the chance to congratulate you. I'm delighted to hear of your good fortune."

"Thank you," said Mr. Moores. "I can hardly yet realize the thing is true. It will make possible so many things I had never dreamed of being able to do. You will have me clamoring for your advice."

"I'm afraid I know very little about handling a fortune," said Hugh, "but I am quite ready to advise you not to desert our small village."

"That's just it. Every inclination calls on me to stay here. It has become my home. I want to do more for the school. There are so many things it lacks! But—" He colored slightly, and as if to shake off a certain embarrassment, rose and walked over to the farther window. He stood for a moment looking out.

Mr. Westerly busied himself with the fire, adjusting the smouldering logs, and crowning them with a fine specimen of white birch. In the crevices he tucked some pine cones, and a cheery crackling began.

Mr. Moores plunged at his task. "There's someone I could care about," he said. The tongs Hugh held slipped to the floor with a clatter. It was a relief that his visitor still stood with his face turned to the window.

"That puts new cause for rejoicing in your good fortune," said Hugh. He felt as if someone else were saying the words. His was suddenly chilled. One of the logs split. Half of it rolled nearer him, with a comforting warmth that seemed almost human.

"There isn't the least reason to think she could—to think I could be anything to her," said Mr. Moores.

"We differ there," said Hugh. "You must have every hope."

He hung the pair of bellows carefully back upon its hook.

"Thank you. It's tremendously good of you to say that," said Mr. Moores.

He turned about now from the window and there was an eager glow on his face. The two men seated themselves on either side of the fire. The schoolmaster's face looked singularly young, and an almost boyish diffidence held him in its grip. Hugh, glancing at him, felt a generous glow at his own heart.

"Perhaps I can guess whom you mean," he said—and now his voice was quite firm—"Miss Anne Seabury."

He didn't wait for an answer (though, indeed, Mr. Moores' deepening color replied) but went on: "How fine she is—so true, and having such delicate insight! Her very touch on the piano betrays her character."

Embarrassment and delight were mingled on his guest's countenance, and Hugh, guessing that he was not quite ready to speak, went on:

"When all is said, how we come back finally to that one quality—sympathy. Certainly in the choice of a wife (a shadow crossed his face) it stands large. An aunt of mine always prone to offer advice, once favored me with a voluminous letter on the subject of marriage. Not that she had any young woman in mind—in fact, the prodigy she described probably doesn't exist. She must be a good cook (Barkis is willin')—she must have several accomplishments, excelling in at least one of them. She must

be intellectually superior. It never occurred to Aunt Adelaide to say, 'let her be sympathetic.' "

"Oh, you are right," said Mr. Moores. "When Miss Seabury was my pupil I constantly felt that quality in her. To my mind, it is the crowning test of a real lady —that indescribable graciousness, that inability to let anyone near you feel ill at ease. And often in school, as I watched Anne doing some act of unobtrusive kindness, those words of Ruskin, 'Unless you are deliberately kind to every creature, you will be cruel to many,' would come to my mind. You mustn't think," Mr. Moores said humbly, "I have reason to feel at all sure she can return my—my feeling for her. In fact—do you know—however, I see I was on the wrong track." He broke off, then pulled himself together, and resumed: "You know, in a country village, how rumors spring out of—out of nothing at all. Well—in short," he flung out desperately, "you don't want her yourself?"

He lowered his eyes as he spoke, and didn't see in Mr. Westerly's stricken face the answer that would have silenced his own hopes. And Hugh was able to say quite steadily, "Go ahead, old man, there's nothing to stop you there."

Mr. Moores sprang to his feet, and seized his friend's hand, shaking it ardently.

" 'Faint heart ne'er won fair lady,' " said the minister, smiling valiantly.

"You have given me courage. I won't take up more of your valuable time. I wish I knew how to thank you!" said Mr. Moores. He looked, indeed, as if his

fair lady were already won, and Hugh's eyes lit from the shining light in his friend's.

Mr. Moores stood a moment, evidently disinclined to go.

"Do stay awhile," said Hugh. "Why, you've only just come."

He pushed forward his guest's chair invitingly as he spoke—a big comfortable arm chair.

Mr. Moores reseated himself. A silence fell, neither man quite ready to speak. The fire hummed a friendly little song. Finally Mr. Moores said: "There is an engagement I have just heard of—after all, I recollect I am not to speak of it for another fortnight—but I am anxious to know how you feel about marriages where there is entire reciprocal respect and even admiration, where the comfort and convenience of both parties is tremendously increased, but where love does not exist, and is, in fact, impossible."

Mr. Westerly smiled. "It is odd that you should bring this up just now," said he, "for before you came in, my sister and I were talking of this very thing. As she and I are united on this point, I will tell you what she said to me. She spent yesterday at a friend's house, where there are several little girls. It was a stormy day, you know, and these children were playing with their dolls. Fanny and Edith had arranged elaborately and with great pains a doll's funeral, but when they got to the actual service, the youngest little girl, Hilda, refused to join in their play. All her sisters' coaxing was of no avail. 'How horrid you are!' said Fanny, 'it's only a game.' 'I know, but I can't.' 'Why?' asked Edith crossly, 'you can't think

of any reason.' 'There isn't any, that's why.' The little sister blushed. Gwendolen said the poor little thing was very unhappy. 'People can't play funerals,' was all she could find to say. 'Of course they can. We are playing 'em. So!' was the triumphant retort. Tears followed, and Gwendolen had to turn comforter. She said to me that this feeling of the child's of the sacredness of death, of its being something not to be touched in the way of imitation, was really exactly the way she herself felt about marriage. Marriage is surely sacred, and to let anything wear the garb of love that is not love itself—I don't say it is exactly wrong—some of the very finest, truest people I know have married in that way—but I can only say that to me it is repellent."

Mr. Moores sat thoughtful. Then he said: "It's a bit puzzling. Theoretically I'm with you and Miss Westerly, every time. And yet in the case of this engagement soon to come out—the woman has had such fearful knocks in life, and her new home will be such a refuge—"

"But that's where folks slip up," broke in the young minister eagerly. "Marriage is not a charity organization. Charity organizations are most excellent things. But marriage is one thing, one thing only, a temple built of God, wherein shall burn the sacred flame of love. To divert it from its own is to pull the rose that was born to send out its fragrance on the garden air, and—" He stopped, laughing a little at his own vehemence—"What shall I say could be done with the rose?"

"And use it to help fill up a chink in the path," finished Mr. Moores. "I'm not sure but that you are right. And yet—but now I really must be going."

The men grasped hands cordially and parted.

All this time Gwendolen had been upstairs with Bobby. They were in her own room, where she was tidying the drawers of her desk, while Bobby lay flat before the fire, his heels in the air, reading Robinson Crusoe.

"Oh, Bobby," said his aunt as she heard the front door close, "run downstairs, dear, and ask Uncle Hugh if he wants supper any earlier tonight."

Bobby relinquished his book gloomily, and went from the room. He could be heard sliding at lightning speed down the banisters; and almost immediately he was running up the stairs again. Gwendolen, glancing up as he reëntered the room, saw an awed expression on the small face.

"Well?" said Miss Westerly.

"He's crying," said Bobby in scared tones.

"Nonsense, you ridiculous child!" said Gwendolen, laughing. "Uncle Hugh crying! He may be singing, if you like. I'm sorry, Bobby dear, but I'll have to get you to try again."

"No, I won't. He's crying. He's crying real hard," said Bobby firmly. In his own mind he was convinced that the odious task of writing a sermon was too much for his adored uncle. Hadn't he himself been reduced to tears yesterday in writing a composition on "Why We Study Geography"? Blamed if he knew why.

Gwendolen sighed as she replaced a small drawer, and went downstairs.

"Do you want—" she began, as she opened the parlor door—and then paused, in her turn taken aback. Hugh stood near the window, his face turned from her, but that

he was weeping uncontrollably was plain; and she hadn't known him to weep since he was a small boy.

Gwendolen's first impulse was to go to him, but quick knowledge of what the brother in ways so like herself would prefer, deterred her. She softly withdrew, and noiselessly closed the door.

CHAPTER X

THE PROPOSAL

There is such a wide difference between quiet people. Some are quiet all through; they come to conclusions after long and thoughtful considerations. Their calmness is felt by those about them, much as one is rested by the balmy stillness of a summer evening. Mr. Moores' quietness was of the other kind. Under his steady reserved exterior lay a leaping fire that now and then broke through the outer crust. This ardent spirit permeated his teaching, and kindled an answering flame in many an indifferent boy or girl. And it was in no sluggish spirit that he began his wooing, confident that as yet no rival barred his way.

He consulted Anne about the plans for a new schoolhouse. She was much interested in this, and glad of a chance to rectify a number of present inconveniences in the old building. Together they contrived separate lockers for outdoor clothing and lunch boxes. Lower desks should be put in for the youngest children, and, best of all, arrangement for enough light. Mr. Moores forgot to study the plans spread out before them, in watching Anne's eager face. The beautiful dark blue eyes raised to his were utterly void of self-consciousness. Color played in her cheeks.

One day they sat thus together in Mrs. Seabury's

dining room. Anne chose this room because the table was of a convenient size for spreading out the drawings. The room was in somewhat faded browns. Three pots of yellow primroses stood in the western window, caressed by the lowering sunshine. Anne sat at the table facing this window, considering designs for a botanical cabinet, and Mr. Moores stood near her, looking, too, at the plans. She glanced up, and exclaimed:

"Oh, look! Was ever anything so lovely!"

Outside the window hung a shining network of ice, quite like rare lace; at either side a long, thick, frosty tassel. The horizon had suddenly taken on a glowing rose color, and this exquisite hue was caught and held by the icicles, so that they and the marvelous curtains were pink. The light fell in such a way that here and there were spots of deeper color, as if an artist had scattered the pink curtain with roses of a little deeper shade. Beneath all glowed the primroses.

Anne felt the passionate delight that always came to her when Nature held forth so quietly and unostentatiously one of her rare gifts. She turned aside for a moment that Mr. Moores should not see the tears that came to her eyes. But the teacher's quick eyes had seen the tears. His voice shook a little. He didn't at all know that he was going to say what he did.

"Anne, won't you come into my life and make it beautiful?"

The blue eyes looked at him with a deepened earnestness. The girl was immediately very still. It seemed to him as if she must have known what was coming. The

solemnity of the moment caught her, so that she felt no embarrassment, but his words totally surprised her.

"I don't really love you," she said gently, so gently that no hint of unkindness could be felt.

"Not yet!" said Mr. Moores eagerly. "I was presumptuous. But let me try to show you—don't answer now."

Anne was still. She looked at the pink icicles. And Mr. Moores stood a little farther from her and waited, his look an embrace, a little frown of earnestness on his brow. His features looked suddenly older. The pink color began to fade from the icicles. One of them fell with a little shiver against the pane.

How little we seem to be able to foretell our own actions. Mr. Moores had thought to have a slow courtship, a wooing delicious in its gradual approach to the great question. He would teach Anne to love, get her so used to his society that when after a reasonable time he should try his fate, perhaps she would have grown to love in return. And now—what had he done, blunderer that he was! Surely he had been to precipitate.

She was not looking at him, but had reseated herself by the table, turning her head a little from him. Her natural shyness was returning. Their intercourse, with its mutual interest in the new schoolhouse, had been a joy to her, but as impersonal as if they had been brother and sister at a game of chess. No, she couldn't look at him; it was impossible. Yet as he, too, was silent, she presently stole a glance at him. And with the glance, and in seeing his pained and baffled look, there sprang up in her heart that element of motherliness that so often is a part of

what a woman feels for a man, even an older man friend.

"Sit down," she said. "I like you and honor you. I always have. But you are so true you want me to be absolutely true. Living as I do, I don't meet many people, and you"—she hesitated and then smiled—"you can't know what it will mean to me if we can always be warm friends. More than that—I can't," she ended, her voice unexpectedly breaking.

She held out her hand and it was held for a moment in both of his.

Mr. Moores' natural helpfulness and elasticity bade him believe that what was now friendliness might in time change to a warmer feeling. He knew he had been rash, so resolved to be henceforth patient and steadfast.

"Thank you for being my friend," he said. Then, with a complete change of tone, "I am going to depend on you, you know, for all sorts of details as to these plans. I brought over some designs for the main door, and would value your opinion very much."

An overwhelming weight was lifted from Anne's mind by his quiet words. There had come a momentary dark fear that in refusing his love she must shut off with it all the bright companionship and interchange of thought that already put fuller life into her days.

His tact was threaded with unusual sympathy. He guessed a good part of what the girl was experiencing. The door designs were taken from his portfolio and arranged in line. He raised the window shade for better light. And for the remaining half-hour no least allusion was made to what was almost exclusively in the mind of each. Once he stopped abruptly in his praise of certain

curving lines in the door ornamentations, when Anne's hand inadvertently touched his, but he went on instantly.

A particularly beautiful door, simple and dignified, was finally their joint choice. A close friend of Mr. Moores, a Mr. Harding of Montreal, was to be the architect, but his ideas so far had not clashed with Mr. Moores', while Anne's least wish was a law to the latter. Having herself been a pupil not so very far back, she knew thoroughly all the ins and outs of the building from the pupil's standpoint, and was therefore a most useful one to consult.

"I sat on the left side of the room," she said, "and on cloudy or stormy days when the other side, which had all the windows, was fairly well lighted, ours was quite a strain on the eyes. How would it be to have a line of electric lights along the left side, one light to every two or possibly three rows of desks?"

"First rate!" agreed Mr. Moores with enthusiasm.

"I hope you didn't injure your eyes?" he added solicitously.

"No," said Anne, "but I think Jessie Dewey—she had weak eyes anyway—did strain hers. And there may have been others."

"A shame!" cried the teacher. "It makes me all the more anxious to hurry things on. I'll write to Harding tonight."

Anne wondered, after he left, if any proposal ending in a refusal ever took place in such a way before. In the novels she had read if the man was deeply in love—and that he was Mr. Moores had made unmistakable—the girl's or woman's refusal resulted either in utter estrangement, or the awkward unavailing efforts to regain the old

friendly footing. That he was pained to the core of his heart she knew; but how generous, how self-forgetful, had been his attitude—how instant his closing the door to those lovely flowered fields of his dearest hopes, and his reopening of the door that looked back to the quiet stretches of familiar friendliness! How good he was! If only she could care for him! But something told her that could never be. She liked him heartily, but she was not in the least in love with him.

Was there, then, any man whom she could learn to love? As she asked herself this question, a tender light came to her eyes, and a little tremulous smile to her lips. But she resolutely turned her thoughts to the new schoolhouse, and all it was going to mean to the boys and girls of Hillstead.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. DOVE'S OPINIONS

To Mr. Moores, with that secret, unquenchable hope upholding him, life just now was of burning interest, and his only difficulty lay in restraining the impulse to go every day to see Anne. The new schoolhouse was rapidly springing up, and the two often turned their steps thither, Anne sometimes asking Jessie Dewey to go with them.

The building was delightfully situated on rising ground overlooking Elderblow Pond (so called because certain old ladies in Hillstead frequented it for picnic suppers) and with a small grove behind sending forth its fragrance of balsam and pine. Over the dignified, attractive main door stood the letters "Old Kensington School," the legacy which had made the building possible having come from Mr. Moores' aunt, Susan Moores, of that ancient town.

One of Anne's minor pet plans was to have wide beds of periwinkle completely surrounding the schoolhouse.

Mrs. Seabury had a visit just at this time from her cousin, Mrs. Ellery Dove. The name Dove did not in the least fit Cousin Minnie. She was a dashing, self-confident woman, full of importance; and, to tell the truth, Mrs. Seabury was already looking forward to the end of the fortnight, when her guest was to depart. She was to leave on Tuesday, and this was Saturday.

MRS. DOVE'S OPINIONS

Mrs. Seabury, Mrs. Dove and Anne were in the living room, the elder women knitting, Anne engaged in arrangements for inviting two girl friends to luncheon in the near future.

"What girls are you having?" asked Cousin Minnie.

"Just Jessie Dewey one day, and Susan Halliday two days later," said Anne. "Let me see—yes, I think my menus are just what I want, at last. It's funny how long it takes to plan the very simplest meals."

She compared the two lists in her hand.

"See if these sound palatable. For Jessie I'm going to have

Grapefruit
Creamed Chicken
Stuffed Potatoes Asparagus
Raspberry Ice Cream Sponge Cake
Coffee

"There! I consider that quite a feast."

"Very nice, dear," said her mother rather absently, as she tried to pick up a dropped stitch.

"I call sponge cake extravagant," said Mrs. Dove, "with eggs going up all the time."

"Oh, well," said Anne, "I don't give parties every day, do I, mother? Besides, it's only a part of one. Now for Susan." She laughed a little as she read:

"Flounders
Boiled Potatoes Scalloped Tomatoes
Sea-moss Blancmange
Blueberry Sauce."

"Why, Anne Seabury!" cried Mrs. Dove in horrified tones, "what are you thinking of? The luncheon you've planned for Jessie ought to be for Susan, and Susan's for Jessie. Ask your mother! The Hallidays are used to the cream of everything."

"That's just why I don't give it to her," said Anne.

"While Jessie," went on Mrs. Dove, unheeding, "you know how the Deweys live. If they have bread and cheese on their table it's about as much as they do have."

"Well, don't you see?" said Anne. "I never could understand why people plan dinner parties and luncheons as they do. They pile all the nicest things on those who have them every day of their lives, while if plain Jane Smith comes to dine she is given baked beans of which she is tired to death. Allow your humble cousin to start a reform. Whatever my guests have to eat, my delightful society will always be ample compensation!"

"Anne, you are the queerest! You'll get the name of being odd, and there's nothing ruins a girl's chances like that. The men don't stand for it."

Anne was called out of the room just then, and Mrs. Dove proceeded, "I'm glad of this chance to talk of Anne a little while she's out of hearing."

"If it's these small luncheons," said Mrs. Seabury, "don't worry. Anne seldom has company. She's a good daughter and deserves the pleasure. As to the expense, it's but little for so few, and she does the more difficult part of the cooking herself."

"It's not that. I don't care how many parties she gives. Though I will say I'd not come twice if I were Susan Halliday. No, it's not the luncheon."

She fixed her eyes solemnly on her cousin. "Is it true that the schoolmaster—what's his name—wants to marry her?"

"Oh, I think you must be mistaken. I've never seen—" She stopped abruptly, remembering various little things she had seen, hardly noticed at the time of happening, that might certainly point that way.

"It's plain he does," went on Mrs. Dove firmly. "Was he not here last night till ten?"

"They were going over the plans," said Mrs. Seabury.

"Fiddlesticks! They've gone over those plans a million times. What I want to say, Lucy, is—see she takes him."

"Of course, if she cares for him," began Mrs. Seabury.

"Fiddlesticks! Care for him or not, he's rich as Croesus. It was a different matter when he first came to Hillstead. But, as things stand, Anne would be simply out of her mind to refuse him. They say that old aunt of his was worth mints—mints! Does the girl know of his fortune?"

"Oh, yes. That wouldn't make any difference with Anne," said Mrs. Seabury, lifting her head rather proudly.

"More fool she!" said Mrs. Dove. "Really, Lucy, I often think you haven't done your duty by that girl, she has such strange ideas. If she plays fast and loose with this schoolmaster—"

"His name is Mr. Moores."

"If she plays fast and loose she'll lose this Moores altogether. Why, Lucy, he's a great catch for her!"

"He's a good young man," said Mrs. Seabury, "hard working and honest as the sun. I do know that. Robert has had dealings with him. All the same, Minnie, I shouldn't want Anne to marry where she didn't love—

rich or no rich," she added, reversing her needle. "Not that it wouldn't please her father and me if she did."

"And well it might," said Mrs. Dove. "Fortunes like his don't walk into Hillstead every year."

"Oh, do hush!" said Mrs. Seabury. "There he is, coming up the walk this minute."

Regardless of the fact that she might be seen, Mrs. Dove hurried to the window and peered out.

"Very good looking," she said approvingly. "Yes, really handsome. Holds his head well."

They could hear Anne coming downstairs. The bell rang, and she went to the front door. Mr. Moores came indoors, and presently the voices of the girl and the young man could be heard in the dining room. Plans were evidently again under discussion. Mrs. Dove beamed.

"After all, I guess Anne knows what she's about," she said.

Mrs. Seabury rose hurriedly. "Come upstairs, Minnie," said she. "I've got to look over those pieces for the sewing circle. Maybe you'll help me choose the right ones for the quilt."

She was anxious to get her guest securely out of hearing from the two across the hall, and she hastened upstairs, Mrs. Dove following with creaking step and many a backward glance at the dining room door, as if she expected by some occult means to pass through it.

Mr. Moores thought that Anne had never looked more charming than today. She wore a plain blue cotton morning gown, with narrow white at neck and wrists. Two or three of the yellow primroses were tucked in her belt.

The dark hair had become loosened a little near her

brow. The blue of the gown brought out the darker beautiful blue of her eyes.

Oh, how could he wait all these months that he had set himself? Yet wait he must, with what patience he could wrest for his difficult task.

"Hugh Westerly's thinking of going to California. Did you know, Miss Anne? He's had a call from somewhere out there."

Anne took out the little flowers from her belt, carefully rearranged them, and put them back.

"No, I hadn't heard," she said.

"It's said to be a good offer," went on Mr. Moores. "He'll be frightfully missed if he goes."

"Yes, indeed," said Anne.

She began abruptly to talk of something else, and was more lively than usual. When Mr. Moores left the house it was with a smile on his lips and hope in his heart.

As soon as the door closed upon him, Anne hurried to her room.

"It's so lucky," she said to herself, her handkerchief pressed to her lips, "so lucky I never saw him very much, and so I never was in danger of loving him."

CHAPTER XII

GOOD-BYE

To Hugh Westerly life at this period was bitterly hard. Merely to see Anne in her accustomed place at church had grown to be torture. He tried to keep his eyes from the sweet serious face, but even away from her it was always before him. Was there a slight wistfulness at times in the beautiful eyes? No, that must be his imagination.

Gwendolen noticed her brother's absorption, and the strained suffering look, but said nothing. She contrived that everything at home should run harmoniously and restfully, and that Bobby should not too often frequent the study.

And then suddenly came this offer to fill the pulpit in a California city. A chance visitor from there had heard Hugh preach the previous summer in the little Hillstead church, and had been greatly drawn to the young minister. A vacancy occurring in his own church, he had exerted his influence always strong, to have the offer sent to Mr. Westerly.

Hugh was greatly astonished and moved to find what his going—for he accepted the call—meant to the Hillstead people. He had felt woefully conscious of late of his own shortcomings, and, wrench that it was to go away, longed to find himself in entirely new surroundings,

where nothing could speak of Anne—of Anne, dear Anne, the treasure of his heart. At times an almost unconquerable impulse seized him to throw every scruple to the winds, and boldly ask her to marry him. Had he cared for her a grain less, I am sure he must have done so, but it was true that her welfare was more to him than his own. He admired his friend ardently, and believed he had but to try to win any girl's heart. In an incredibly brief time plans were settled, home affairs wound up, and Hillstead stood face to face with a greater loss than its modest young minister realized.

Here is part of a letter that Gwendolen wrote at this time to her friend, Leslie Yale.

"Hugh's going is so unexpected, and I can hardly imagine life without him. When he told me of the plan, I had no other idea but of going with him. Wherever he is would be home to me. But it is not to be. You know that old heart trouble of mine. I made light of it to my doctor, and assured him there are no longer any traces of it. But he solemnly shook his handsome gray head, and said to live in a city would be utterly out of the question for me. He went on most provokingly to say that the fact of my health having been so established here was reason enough for staying. I argued with the poor man nearly an hour, but he wouldn't budge. Hugh backed him up. So behold me, a Hillsteader, for the rest of my days! But I take comfort in two things—that I've worried for some time over Hugh's not seeming at all well, and think this complete change the very best thing for him; and secondly, as the church where he goes is not rich, the vacation is perforce a rather long one, and I

trust to get him home every summer. You will have to be charitable, and make me many a winter's visit."

Bobby's mother had been delicate ever since the birth of her twin girls, but was now stronger, and eager to get her little boy home. To Bobby's unbounded joy, Uncle Hugh was to travel with him as far as St. Louis and stay over Sunday there.

"Will you be a grizzly for my twins, no matter if it's Sunday?" asked Bobby, an anxious eye on his uncle. And Hugh said he would certainly be a grizzly, no matter what the day of the week. "I may as well be shot for a bear as a cub," said he, when Gwendolen protested that she felt sure that between so many children the parents would get no good of him.

Gwendolen had a modest annuity of her own, and she decided to keep on in the pleasant house where she felt so at home, in spite of counter-advice from a host of people who held up their hands in horror, convinced that she would die of loneliness before the first week was out.

"I'm never lonely," she said. "There isn't time. Besides, I have Marcus Aurelius."

Marcus Aurelius was a black cat, wise of eye and dignified in demeanor. He followed his mistress about more closely than ever, as if to assure her that she was not to be deserted by all the world.

"I'll keep your room just as it is, Hugh," said Gwendolen, resting her hand on his arm, in one of their unwonted caresses, "and then who knows when you may be flying back East again!"

Hugh said nothing, but put his hand for an instant

over hers. The sad look in his eyes haunted her afterwards.

He was to leave Hillstead on a certain evening in late September. Anne awoke that morning with a feeling of extreme depression and restlessness, which only increased as the day wore on, even though she kept determinedly at her usual tasks. Her pallor and preoccupation were at last evident to Mrs. Seabury. Anne ate but little dinner. As they rose from the table, her mother said:

"Now, dear, you've done all that you ought, and more than you ought, in the house today. I want you to do as I say, and go for a nice restful afternoon out-of-doors. Take a book into the woods, why don't you? It'll be nice and cool there. Now do, child?"

Nothing could have better suited Anne's mood. And in a short time she started forth, Mrs. Seabury standing at the door to watch her down the road, a gentle breeze fluttering some yellow leaves upon her blue cotton gown as she passed along. The book Anne held in her hand, "Old Kensington," was almost as familiar to her as the road she trod. She chose it on days like this for its soothing, refreshing atmosphere. But when she came to the woods she didn't, after all, read. The sea was many miles away, yet there was constantly a suggestion of it in the light breeze that filtered through the branches. It lured her to take a longer walk than she had meant, and to reach a high knoll beyond the stretch of woods, from which a slender far-distant line of ocean might on clear days be discovered. Anne didn't hurry, and it was a full hour before she stood near the top of the knoll.

The breeze was a little stronger here and most refresh-

ing—so cool, indeed, that presently she went a little way down the farther side to where a group of sturdy cedars made a snug shelter, from which the lovely blue sea line might still be visible.

All day Anne had felt a curious sense of living in a dream. Sorrow that she would not admit was knocking at her heart. And somehow she felt scarcely more surprise than if she had indeed been dreaming when, as she went within the little retreat, she saw Hugh Westerly. He half lay upon the ground, his head (the light hair boyishly tousled) resting against a cedar trunk. A book had slipped from his hand and lay beside his gray cap. He was asleep.

Anne's impulse was to retrace her steps. But Hugh was going so far—it might be months, even years, before she saw him again—it was impossible not to take this last stolen look, but she hardly dared breathe lest he might awake. Oh, he had grown thin, and he was pale! There was a stab at her heart as she saw it, and the look of repressed sadness about his mouth. It must be a great wrench to leave his sister, their intimacy had been so close.

She turned noiselessly to go, but something had made the sleeper aware of her presence. He opened his eyes, and was on his feet. Their eyes met in sheer uncontrolled delight. They stepped shyly toward each other like children.

"Here is a sofa for you, quite away from the wind," said Hugh, as if she were a guest he had been expecting. Anne felt herself trembling a little, and was glad to take the mossy seat.

"What have you been reading?" was all she found to say.

"Keats," said Hugh.

"Won't you read one of the poems to me?"

Before he did so, Hugh asked her to change her seat to the other more comfortable end of the moss sofa.

"You shall feast on these while I read," said he, and presented her with three giant blueberries upon a fern.

"Blueberries!" exclaimed Anne in astonishment.

"We can't blame them for staying on in a place like this," said Hugh, "though I assured Bobby this morning there wouldn't be one in the whole region. I'd never dare tell of these. He was keen to come, but—well, I wanted the time alone."

"And then I had to come," said Anne. Her rare pretty smile came as she spoke.

"Let me see," said Hugh. "There are only three berries. It won't take you long to eat them, and then you can go at once."

He looked gravely at her, but somewhere in his eyes was a boy's laughter.

"But not till you've read me at least one of the poems," said Anne. She was not the pale girl she had been of late. A little breeze crept in and caressed her dark hair. Hugh looked into the blue eyes, and forgot to answer. Time stood still for them both. Then he seemed to recall himself. He picked up the little worn, brown volume, and settled himself on the ground at a little distance from Anne.

"Now begin on your lunch, or you'll never have done," said he.

"They are too lovely to eat," said Anne. "They're a true French blue."

The blue indeed, exactly matched her gown.

It ended by Hugh's reading several poems, among them one beginning:

"I stood tiptoe on a little hill.
The air was cooling, and so very still,
That the sweet buds which with a modest pride
Pull droopingly, in slanting curve aside,
Had not yet lost those starry diadems,
Caught from the early sobbing of the morn.
The clouds were pure and white as flocks new shorn,
And fresh from the clear brook; sweetly they slept
On the blue fields of heaven, and then there crept
A little noiseless noise among the leaves,
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves,
For not the faintest motion could be seen,
Of all the shades that slanted o'er the green."

Anne, in return, read to him a poem she had liked and copied and found in her pocket. How many times in the months afterwards her low sweet voice came back to Hugh in the first verse:

"Summer has flashed her golden shuttle by my dreaming eye;
Its shining web of days so soft and fair without a care,
Are folding down into the silent past, too bright to last."

A little stronger tinge of salt crept to them to mingle with the odor of balsam. The clouds were heaped softly high, and made wonderful changing pictures. The sun lit up the dewy leaves and ferns and mosses near at hand, while beyond them the valley lay golden in the sunlight, and tender blue in the shadow.

Neither Hugh nor Anne alluded to his departure. Was it possible that by tonight he would be whirling away from the East? Each resolutely shut out the thought.

From somewhere down below came the plaintive note of a field sparrow.

"Sometimes," said Anne a little shyly, "God seems so far away, and not at all real. But here, today, I believe in Him. He is a friendly reality."

"May He guard you always!" said Hugh, low and fervently.

It seemed to Anne that she could never feel happier than at that moment. The past was not. The future was not. If only this flitting hour—exquisite with its penetrating sweetness—could be held! Words mattered little. They began presently to reminisce of childhood days. Hugh made Anne laugh by a tale of some boyish exploit. She told him of some of her own absurd early fears. She had never dreaded things, but only people. As to this, they found much in which they sympathized.

A branch was lifted, and a face looked in on them. It was Trix, and she was laughing, and panting somewhat from a rapid climb.

"Aha!" said she, pointing a mocking finger, "so here you are, having a nice little flirtation all by your two selves!"

Anne felt intensely annoyed. Mr. Westerly, after a quick glance at her, turned to the intruder.

"How do you do, Miss Faxon? It's a wonderful day for a climb, isn't it?"

"You may think so," she said, throwing herself down upon the ground. "My feet ache so, I doubt if I can walk

down again." (She wore thin, high-heeled shoes that showed the scratch of briers). "I saw you headed this way"—addressing Anne, but looking coyly at the minister —"and thought I'd join you. But you walked too fast for me."

"This is a better seat," said Anne, somewhat stiffly.

"Well, I should say!" replied Trix, making the exchange. "So you're off tonight, Mr. Westerly! We'll have to go to the station to see him off, Anne."

"I'm afraid that will be impossible," said Anne.

"I'll be there, anyhow. You have one loyal member of your church," said Trix. "What train are you going on?"

"I couldn't think of letting you take the trouble," said Hugh. "That reminds me, my final packing is still to be done, and I must be going down—that is, as soon as you feel equal to starting."

He looked at his watch.

"I'm sure I'm not anxious to stay," said Trix, a bit sulkily. "There's nothing to see up here. If Hillstead would only wake up and fix this place, it would be worth while. It's just right for picnics, if it only had one or two merry-go-rounds and a band stand."

"You quite alarm me as to what I may find on my return to Hillstead," said Hugh, laughing.

When Trix was fully rested they descended the hill, and made their way home through the woods, Trix chattering, Anne almost silent, Hugh talking lightly for Anne's sake, but heartsore at losing this hour with her alone. It would have meant so much!

At eleven that night, Anne, lying awake in her narrow

white bed, heard the whistle of the western train. She wondered if Hugh's thoughts came back to her, as hers must follow him. That hateful ending of the afternoon with Trix would be forgotten, but surely, surely, the bright preceding hours could never, at least for her, grow dim. Hugh's strong friendliness stayed her, and his voice when he had said, "May He guard you always!" Tears came to her eyes as she heard the last faint whistle of the train echoed along the ledge, but she was not unhappy.

Quite a little knot of the parishoners were on the platform to see the minister off, among them Trix, resplendent in a new and stylish suit; and the evident affection and sorrow of most of the number in the parting touched him greatly. Bobby, important in a new overcoat and his eyes big with expectation, clung to Hugh's hand. Among the men was Mr. Moores, and just before the train started, Hugh managed to get a word with him alone, a word that steadied what, since the afternoon's occurrence, had become a wavering purpose. Sometimes at a critical moment words can be said that would not be forthcoming at another time, and Hugh, feeling his doubts must be cleared, asked in a low voice, as he held his friend's hand, "How does your suit prosper?"

Mr. Moores flushed brightly. "I can't help hoping," he said, pressing Hugh's hand fervently. "Perhaps I ought not, but yet, I do hope."

The train was there. There was no time for more. But that word carried conviction. Bobby fell almost instantly to sleep, soothed by the motion of the train, but it was nearly dawn and they were far from Hillstead when sleep came at last to Hugh.

CHAPTER XIII

GRASPING THE NETTLE

"She is a woman, one in which the springtime of her childish years hath never lost its fresh perfume."—LOWELL.

There came now into Anne's life an experience not easy to depict. One writes of all the gracious beauties of full spring, of its bursting buds, its fragrant air, and of the joyous songs of the birds. But who can describe that exquisite time just before we fully decide that winter has indeed gone—that transition period when one thrills at catching some morning the first note of a bluebird, or at seeing the blue scilla in the grass? The sun has banished the chill wind, fluttering hopes and thoughts of half-forgotten dear things arise in the heart. To be alive is a miracle that makes each day a grateful prayer.

It was something much like this that now threw its forecasting light upon Anne's way. I think we do not often enough realize the greatness of the founding of a real friendship. Our neighbor starts for Europe, and to all in her vicinity that is a vastly important event. But when we see someone embarking on the sea of human relationship, with all its hidden possibilities, we take it much more lightly. Often, too, we do someone grave injustice, confounding genuine steadfast feeling with the silly excitement over someone that never can stand the

test of time. Six months sees the ebbing of such imitation friendship.

"I see your Anne is getting a crush on that Miss Westerly," said Mrs. Dove in undovelike tones. "Now, for the goodness sake, Lucy, nip that in the bud, straight off. It's morbid, that's what it is—morbid!"

"I don't see it that way," said Mrs. Seabury. "Anne has improved in more than one way since she has seen more of Gwendolen Westerly!"

"Gwendolen! So that's her name, is it? High-flown enough! Mark my words, Lucy, she'll put Anne up to all sorts of notions."

"So far," said Mrs. Seabury pleasantly, "its only result has been to make my girl a lot more interested in everything; I don't mean just outside things, either, but in all the home work, too."

"I don't stand for it," said Mrs. Dove obstinately. "Morbid, I call it. Mr. Moores seemed quite put out when he found she wasn't home yesterday."

Mrs. Seabury sewed a little faster.

"We must have some of the corn Anne put up for dinner today. I want you should taste it."

"What kind is it?" said Mrs. Dove with interest.

"Golden Bantam. She raised the corn herself, too. It was extra good this year."

"Maybe you could spare me a jar or two to take home in my valise. I packed kind o' loose, thinking I might need the room going back."

"I can spare some string beans, and I'll be glad to give you a jar of the corn," said Mrs. Seabury. "Robert likes

the corn particularly, so I like to keep a good deal on hand."

"You spoil that man, Lucy. He makes a god of his stomach. I took note he ate three helps of spiced grape yesterday."

"He certainly seemed to approve of the grape," said Mrs. Seabury, laughing good-naturedly, "but I don't call his appetite big, for a man."

"Just show me what you do call big, then," said her cousin.

"Maybe you'd like some tumblers of the grape," said Mrs. Seabury. "They'd go nicely in the corners of your bag."

"So they would. If there's anything I hate it is to carry a flabby, wrinkled-looking valise. I daresay Robert will carry it to the station for me."

Anne sometimes contrasted these days with the time, so long since, when she had parted from Dick Allison. Then forlorn hopes alternated with bitter despair. But now, although she and Hugh did not write to each other, she felt a strong sense of his staunchness, and was proud to know him her friend.

She was not unhappy. Indeed, the new and greater cheerfulness was as if the waters of a little bubbling spring had finally reached the brook to go singing and rippling in its way to clearer and larger waters. The brook might be narrow, but it widened, if slowly, as it went. And as the little stream is turbulent at times in its course over the stones, so Anne met occasional difficulties in this growing friendship with Gwendolen Westerly. It was as if she held something precious, afraid to let it fall. These

early fears were undeniably a hindrance. While drawing a veil over her own real worth, they made the dear new friendship seem to her like a dream that must dissolve. At such times through their intercourse went the thought, "If I should love her!"

But deeper water waited for the little brook. Gwendolen's nature had a large patience. She had grown to love Anne, not as Anne loved her, but truly. She guessed in part Hugh's feeling for the girl, but was too delicate-minded to let Anne suspect her knowledge of it. She wrote voluminously to her brother, and I am afraid he skipped portions of the closely written sheets to where Anne's name appeared in an account of some afternoon walk or pleasant reading.

Gwendolen's magnetic charm drew many people to her and among them were friends of long standing, women she had known long before Anne entered her life.

One morning Gwendolen and Anne were seated together with their work and a book on the Westerly piazza. They were reading by turns from the Newcomes, and presently Anne took the book. Interesting as the chapter was, her thoughts would now and then stray, and her eyes lift from the page to the face and form beside her. Every motion aroused by the vivid story was reflected in Gwendolen's features. To watch for these reflections was as delicious as to look upon waves instantly transformed under the impress of sun or shadow. The strong sweet mouth grew tender or grave, or curved into sudden laughter. Color came into her cheeks. Gwendolen had a pretty way, when deeply absorbed by the story, of dropping her work, and resting her cheek upon her hand.

The contour of the drooping head was lovely. Anne wished that she were an artist, and could draw it.

The slender feet were always carefully shod. Indeed, a minor attraction to Anne, but not a small one, was that Gwendolen was always so trimly clothed, never a bow awry nor belt slipping. One got the same distinct pleasure from her apparel as in seeing the white decks of a comely yacht, which has no fear of the searching sunlight. Today her gown was of a soft white, sprinkled with minute green leaves. A narrow white ruffle fluttered at neck and wrists. A slender black velvet girdle clasped her waist.

Anne was just beginning a fresh chapter when the front gate swung open and Miss Margaret Eliot was seen coming up the path.

Gwendolen exclaimed, "Oh, how glad I am to see you!" and setting down her work basket, hurried to meet her friend. They clasped hands and kissed.

A miserable feeling of jealousy rose in Anne, of which she was as wretchedly ashamed. It seemed to her impossible that she could ever count much, if any, with one who already was surrounded with such friends as this. For, in spite of the jealousy, the sight of Margaret Eliot brought to her mind the lines:

"Such a one do I remember
Whom to look at was to love."

Purity and goodness sat enthroned in her face. She could no more be criticized than could the fragrant mayflower. But Anne set herself to combat the ignoble feeling. Every time it rose, she stamped it down. I wish I

could say complete success came soon. It did not. It was a long time in coming.

Mrs. Seabury had the good sense to appreciate to the full the advantage it was to Anne to be thrown with Miss Westerly. It was just such little intimate scenes as the present that were to teach her what her limited life must otherwise have shut out.

Gwendolen's manners were more than kind; they had that indescribable touch that comes of having met a variety of persons in different places, of knowing how to bring ease and naturalness into strained relations, and particularly how to bring out the best that is in each person. Before she was aware of it, Anne was happily answering some questions of Miss Eliot's as to the schoolhouse. Gwendolen led her on, and the topic became absorbing to all three. They agreed that the girls and boys of Hillstead were to enter on a new era. Miss Eliot had not seen the plans, and Gwendolen bringing out pencil and paper, Anne was able to draw outlines that gave some idea of the various rooms.

"The front door is what Mr. Moores will speak of first," she said. "He is very proud of it! I believe it is designed from part of one in Salem, and part of another in Old Kensington in England. I wish I had the skill to draw that for you. But Mr. Moores will be only too delighted to show you the designs. It is a beauty! I think he carries it next his heart."

Feeling that the two friends might like to talk by themselves, before very long Anne bade them good-bye, and walked home, a warm growing liking for Miss Eliot

mingling with her disappointment at losing part of the reading, or rather having it postponed.

Some months later, after many delightful readings in the interval, Anne was again sitting with Gwendolen, this time in the latter's bedroom, when Margaret Eliot's light step was heard on the stair. And Anne felt it a pleasant sound, and when Margaret entered the room, could greet her with genuine cordiality, and rejoice that Gwendolen's life was enriched by such a friend. To her own surprise the old feeling was gone—gone never to return.

It is often so, I think. We are many times nearest fulfillment when the good seems to us farthest away. After this Anne could see more clearly. Each person stood for him- or herself. There no more need be rivalry than between the rose in the front garden and the hollyhock nodding by the kitchen window. We can't all be roses, but the friendly hollyhock is not to be despised.

CHAPTER XIV

A TURNING POINT

"You're a born fool, if ever there was one!" said Trix.

She and Dick Allison were seated in the Faxon sitting room, from which the children had been ruthlessly banished. Mrs. Faxon had cheerfully carried her mending basket upstairs to her own room, while her husband, with a smothered growl, betook himself, the evening paper under his arm, to the dining room.

Dick frowned, an angry red mounting in his cheeks.

"I'll explain once more," he said stiffly.

"Explain all night, it won't alter what I think," said Trix. "Here are two lines of business open to you. In the one, if you have any 'go' in you—I begin to doubt it —you can make money hand over fist—in the other the chances are you'll never get anywhere.'

"Look here, Trix," said Dick, "now listen to me! I've always wanted to get in with some shipbuilder. There's a lot that's mighty interesting about it."

Trix tried to break in, but he went on. "You don't know a thing about it! I've looked into it. There are things in it I have a talent for." (Trix laughed scornfully.) "Mr. Hathaway says I'm just the man he's after. And we'd be right by the water all the time," he ended boyishly.

"'By the water'!" sneered Trix. "All you need put your mind on is, 'Is there *money* in it?'"

Her face changed even as she spoke. Hard lines came about the eyes and mouth. It was not lovingly that Dick looked at her. She went on, "Here you've made a good start in the hardware trade. You're pretty sure to rise, with your uncle over you that way."

"He's not my uncle. He's only a hundredth cousin or something. He doesn't care a fig about me."

"Never mind, he's something to you. And he's awfully rich. He might die."

"Trix, I'd get more to start with from Hathaway & Co. than I got at first from Borden. It won't be what I get now from Borden, I admit, but the outlook—say three years from now—is better. Hathaway's got a first-class reputation, too. I know lots of fellows that would give a pile to get in with 'em."

Three years ahead was too long a look for Trix. She believed herself to be very practical, and so she was in some ways, but she was totally unable to see much beyond the present.

"Let them get in, all of them," said she, "but you have a grain of sense, and stay just where you are."

"It's deathly dull. I hate it!" said Dick, kicking a small hassock across the room as he spoke.

"You don't have to spoil our furniture if you do hate it," said Trix. "Now, don't say another word about it. If you talked a thousand years, I should feel just the same."

"You're the one that's foolish," said Dick heatedly. "You don't look ahead. Women never do. The chances

are I'd a lot better work in a line where I felt a real interest all the time. It stands to reason."

"You ought to feel interested in any business that's going to support your wife," said Trix coldly. "You're as selfish as you can live, Dick Allison."

Dick rose, and began to put on his coat. "I may as well be going," he said.

Did Trix feel a little frightened? She by no means wished to break with Dick—at any rate not at present. So she rose, and, going up to him, took his hand, and rested her fluffy head against his shoulder. She was her prettiest tonight, in a gown of cherry poplin.

"Dick," she said alluringly, "you know why it is I care to have you get on. It's only so we may be married, and I can have you all to myself."

His face softened somewhat.

"Take off your coat, you foolish boy," she said.

He slowly did so, and put his arm about her waist. Trix slipped a soft, dimpled hand into his, and he crushed it with sudden violence.

"Don't break my heart, Dick," she said appealingly, "by leaving this business where you've done so splendidly."

He was silent, and again his face was grim.

"Don't you see I've a talent for the other?" he asked, a note of wistfulness in his voice to which she was dead.

"Of all the obstinate men!" she said, playfully. "Now you will do as your own little girl wants you to."

She nestled closer against him. He loved the soft feel of her cheek upon his that was bent to meet it. Suddenly the whole matter seemed irrelevant. What did he care where his work lay, if only he might hold this soft pink-

and-white creature in his arms. He drew her closer, and yet closer.

"When will you marry me, Trix?" he whispered hotly.

"Say first you will do what I want."

"All right, when will you marry me?"

"Oh, there's no hurry about that," she replied lightly. "You must be drawing bigger pay first. We mustn't be foolish children."

A step was heard nearing the door. He sighed, letting Trix go, and stood a few paces apart, as Mrs. Faxon entered the room. She looked a little embarrassed at interrupting them, and advanced somewhat awkwardly into the room.

"What is it you want, mother?" asked Trix impatiently.

"I left one of my number 70 spools down here—yes, there it is—" taking it from the center table.—"Have you come to any decision about your work, Dick? Your mother told me. I do hope you're going to accept Mr. Hathaway's offer. It's a rare chance."

"There you go, mother!" cried Trix angrily, "just as I'd got some sense talked into him."

Mrs. Faxon, disregarding her daughter, stepped heavily nearer to Dick. She was a very stout woman, and with her dark coloring a stranger would not have suspected her to be the mother of the blonde and fairylike girl.

"Dick, never heed this child. She'll learn wisdom later, I hope. Her father and I both feel so pleased at Mr. Hathaway's offering to take you in. He's a man of the highest honor. He's sure to do the square thing by you. And, too, as Mr. Faxon says, you've got a natural knack for naval architecture."

Dick looked unhappily from mother to daughter.

"I guess you aren't the one that's going to marry Dick," said Trix. "I guess I'm the one to have a say in it."

"Oh, you'll have your 'say,' " said her mother. "Don't heed her, Dick. I'm saying this fully as much for her good as for yours."

"Now, mother!" broke in Trix.

"And money isn't everything," proceeded Mrs. Faxon in her moderate tones. "Remember that, my boy. We've talents given us we must be faithful to, and conserve for. Well, I've got my spool, and I won't bother you any longer."

She went slowly and creakingly from the room. She was like a ferryboat, Dick thought, while Trix reminded him of a light, trig, white-winged catboat.

"Your mother's got mighty good sense, Trix," he said soberly. Mrs. Faxon had appealed to the best that was in him. His face had a softened, truer look. But Trix was furious. Her blue eyes flashed and she stamped her small foot.

"The way I'm interfered with by father and mother is the limit! I won't stay home if they keep it up. It's my affair."

"And mine a little, I suppose," said Dick somberly.

"Why, of course! Mother won't say any more, that's one thing. She says her say, and that's an end of it. But I'm sure you see my side."

She snuggled up to him again. He made a last effort.

"Trix, I believe you mean all right, but you see just one spot; and your mother sees all around, and away ahead. Can't you ever give up?"

At this, to his consternation, the girl burst into a flood of tears. Dick had never seen anyone cry as she cried. She threw herself on the sofa, and her tears came unceasingly, with an abandon that had in it fury and spite, but also a strange element almost of enjoyment.

And Dick knelt down beside the sofa, and gathered the childlike shaken figure into his arms. Trix clung to him, but her weeping was unabated.

"There, there!" he said. "Stop it, Trixie. You'll make yourself sick. See here, stop it! I'll—I'll do anything you like."

When he was about to leave the house, Mr. Faxon stepped from the dining room into the front hall. He had never taken particularly to Dick, but now his face wore a friendly look.

"I met Hathaway today, Dick," he said genially—"congratulations!"

"I'm not going to him," said Dick curtly, "I'm staying on with the Borden firm."

Trix was like an upleaping flame as she ran upstairs, laughing triumphantly. Dick closed the front door with a bang. The father and mother were left in the front hall. They looked at each other with sober, despondent faces.

CHAPTER XV

THE REMINDER

"Anne, dear, can you come into my room a moment?"

Anne, who was dusting her own room, was struck by the tone of her mother's voice, a tone having the quiet of suppressed excitement. She let her duster lie on the mantel, and went at once into the adjoining bedroom.

Mrs. Seabury sat down in a rocker near one of the windows, and Anne took a low window chair close beside her mother.

"What is it, mother?" she asked a little anxiously, and taking Mrs. Seabury's worn hand in both her firm young ones.

Suddenly the older woman, to her own distress, broke into sobs.

"Oh, Anne," she said, "what are we to do?"

That her mother—her calm, well-poised mother—should cry was to the girl alarming. She knelt down beside the old rocker, and put her arm closely about her.

"Tell me, mother darling!"

But for some moments Mrs. Seabury could not speak. Then she said—and her voice still trembled a little—

"Some years ago your Uncle Hiram invested money for your father. He led your father to think it was to bring great returns. And now he writes every cent, every cent, Anne, is lost."

"There must be some way to get a part back," said Anne in consternation.

"No. Your father's been up to Hiram's, and they've talked the whole thing out. Hiram meant everything right. He put in a lot of his own, too; but it doesn't come so hard on him—he's well-to-do. Anne," she concluded solemnly, "it was nearly every bit your father had saved."

"Uncle Hiram ought never to have persuaded him!" said Anne indignantly. "He knew perfectly well father could not take such a risk."

"Yes, I feel that too. Yet I do believe Hiram had faith that he was doing Robert a good turn."

"He was very foolish!" said Anne, with the severity of youth. Neither of them would reproach her father. Mr. Seabury was a hard-working, self-denying man, but, as Mrs. Dove once expressed it, "too easily gulled." He had most lovable qualities, and Anne adored him, though, as toward her mother, she rarely expressed her affection in words.

"Is it really all lost?" she asked.

"Not a half-penny left," said Mrs. Seabury. "And your father's no longer young, Anne."

"Don't feel it too much. We'll think of something," said the girl. Her blue eyes were bent on the floor, her hands were clasped about her knees, and she searched her mind for some remedy for this evil that had come upon them.

"Don't either of you worry. You tell father not to worry. I'm still young; if he isn't. And there are several things I can do. I'm sure, though I haven't had

training, I could teach the youngest children in the Academy. You know they need a new teacher. Miss Ellery's going to be married next month."

Already Mrs. Seabury looked less sorrowful. She could not take her eyes from Anne's kind, comforting face.

"We don't want to burden you," she said. And even as she spoke, a thought entered her mind of a more desirable way out, a remembrance of Mr. Moore's devotion to her daughter and all that a marriage with him might now mean.

Perhaps Anne guessed whither her mother's thoughts were tending, for she blushed and said hurriedly:

"It couldn't be a burden to help you two dear people. If I find I can't teach—but I believe I can—I'll offer to help Miss Dana in the greenhouse. I'm not sure but I'd like that best. She said to me yesterday she wished she had someone to tie up bunches of violets and mixed flowers, and to fill baskets attractively. That's the part she can't herself do, very well, she says."

Other possible plans cropped up in Anne's eager mind; but I may say here that she did finally decide to work for Miss Dana, to the great satisfaction of that good woman.

The work was congenial, and the hours not too long, leaving time at the two ends of the day for tasks at home. It was a joy to realize that she was the cause of the dark menacing shadow's retreating from her parents' view. Their faces grew happier as the weeks went by, and they saw Anne had not tired of her new duties.

But she knew that the schoolmaster often had a place in their minds, and grew almost cold in her own welcome of him when he came to see her, as she saw the cordiality

they were unable to repress. It was not that they wanted anything for themselves, but they knew that in marrying Mr. Moores Anne would be entering on a life bringing every comfort. His character was established, his health excellent, his disposition charming. None of these points were lost on the other Hillstead girls. Jessie Dewey, for instance—how the girl blushed if he so much as glanced in her direction! It grew harder for Mrs. Seabury to respond lightly when Mrs. Dove would ask, "When is that fool daughter of yours coming to her senses?"

There came a day when Anne wavered. The weather all day had been sultry and dispiriting. Few sales of flowers had been made. Her head ached and an unwonted depression hung over her like a pall as, on her return from the greenhouse, she rested in her room awhile before supper.

After all, why should she not put out her hand and take that of this good man? What could she lose in doing so? And what would she not gain? Would not it mean for her father a renewal of all that he saw fit to give up, of a quiet and happy mind for her mother? It almost seemed to her that she was indeed cruel to deny them what it was so easily in her power to give.

And was Mr. Moores merely good? No, he was delightful; his manners were charming. Half the older girls in the Academy were in love with him. Was Mrs. Dove so far wrong in thinking her present course senseless?

If only she could love him! But why need one love? Would not cordial liking and full respect suffice? He was coming to call that evening. Suddenly she sat up

straighter, resolve gripping her. To do the thing that would most gladden her father and mother seemed more important than anything else in the world.

She changed her gown hurriedly, choosing one of soft white, with a touch of violet at neck and wrists. Her dusky hair was shaken down, and rearranged as simply as before but more becomingly. The color came and ebbed in her cheeks.

She was soon ready to go down. At supper Mrs. Seabury immediately noticed the care with which Anne had dressed, though she spoke only to her husband. They discussed in detail the town meeting held that afternoon.

"They've voted to widen this road as far as Cross Corners," said Mr. Seabury with satisfaction.

"That will be nice," said Anne, as if she had not heard what he said. She was not hungry. How could her parents eat as if they enjoyed it on such a burning night? She excused herself on the plea of the heat, and went to sit on the front porch, where presently Mr. Moores joined her. She was very pale, he thought, as he came up the steps. She had, indeed, now fully resolved to accept him if he should ask her.

As she rose to greet him, a slip of paper fell from the handkerchief she held in her hand. It must have been taken unknowingly with the handkerchief from the bureau drawer where both had lain. Mr. Moores, smiling at her, stooped to pick up the bit of paper, and handed it to her. As she reseated herself, she glanced at it, and saw words from the poem she had long ago copied.

"The air was cooling, and so very still—"

Oh, where was she? Not here on the hot porch with

Mr. Moores. No—for one brief entrancing moment she was far away on the hilltop, with the sweet spicy breath of balsam about her, and a blue thread of sea ahead, Hugh's face was near, and he was reading to her the lines from Keats. —

Only a moment, and the vision was gone.

Mr. Moores stayed till the moon had long risen, and the air grown chill. But when he again urged Anne to marry him, she said in a very low voice, so low that he had to bend to catch the words, "I am so sorry! I can't. Please do not ask me again."

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREENHOUSE

> Great thoughts go best with common duties—Whatever, therefore, may be your office, regard it as a fragment in an immeasurable ministry of love.—B. F. Westcott.

The first day that Anne spent in the greenhouse was most useful to her, for while following Miss Dana about and doing her bidding, she had a chance not only to learn the various duties that would be expected of her but to see many little things that she was sure needed to be done differently. Of course she would not stray from any wish of Miss Dana, but she was employed because Miss Dana realized that, although she herself had always been successful in rearing plants, the greenhouse needed certain innovations which she felt unable to bring about.

On this first day Anne had not been ten minutes with Miss Dana when a very elegant carriage drawn by two proud-stepping horses stopped before the greenhouse. A gentleman came in and asked to buy a basket of flowers. He explained that they were for his invalid wife, who was waiting in the carriage.

With nervous fingers Miss Dana broke off a flower here, and another there, their colors not harmonizing particularly; and she crammed the basket too full, so that the poor posy looked gasping for breath.

The gentleman looked at his purchase doubtfully, but he didn't know what was amiss.

"Suppose I give them a drink before they start on their journey," proposed Anne gently, and Miss Dana, much relieved, put the unsightly basket into her hands, saying "Do anything you like with it, my dear. It needs more than water."

Their purchaser was glancing at his watch, so Anne lost not a minute. But she had time to change the tall red basket topped with a bow of gold gauze for a low one of pretty brown, with a simple stem-like handle. In the bottom of the basket she placed some wet moss. She then chose some springlike flowers, primroses nestling against violets, a touch of mignonette, a sprig of white narcissus, some maiden hair fern. She loosened the stems, and the flowers drank and held up their lovely heads.

The gentleman smiled very pleasantly, as he took the basket from her hand.

They could hear his wife exclaim as she received it, "Oh, Malcolm, how adorable!"

"Anne, you saved my life!" exclaimed Miss Dana, and Anne felt that she was making a beginning.

She suggested that the little entrance room, where the purchasers waited, be made more attractive. Her father, who would move the meetinghouse for Anne if she wanted it, brought from their barn where it had stood sometime unused, a quaint tall-backed settee. Anne, in some spare time, painted this dark green, and against the light-gray wall of the room it made quite a difference.

Anne cleared the clutter of faded flowers and seed catalogues from the long counter. She covered the

counter with a fresh white cloth, cut from a partly worn table cloth. And on this she set a shallow glass dish of the rose petals that had fallen from some of the laden bushes, and a wide bowl filled with forget-me-nots.

Stepping back and eyeing her work, Anne now decided that a neat pile of the flower catalogues would not be out of place; but she sorted out the newest ones, removing those that were old and tattered.

"Do let me hang on the wall that picture you have in your attic that's always bewitched me since I was a little girl," said she.

"Which one can you mean?" asked Miss Dana.

"Why, the one of a little girl in blue reaching on tiptoe to smell a rose that bends down to her from a moss-grown wall."

"That!" said Miss Dana, "Why the blue's all faded out of her frock, and the frame's a sight!"

"That doesn't matter a bit. It's a charming frock, and the blue's all the prettier for being faded. Do you mind?"

"Why, of course I don't, my dear," said Miss Dana, smiling at the girl's eagerness. "Bring down any pictures you like. There's one I always thought very pretty, of Cousin Alfred's garden. But brother disliked it, so I couldn't hang it downstairs."

Anne shuddered at the thought, but thanked her kind friend. If she remembered aright, Cousin Alfred's garden was hideous. It was left to adorn the attic, but the little girl in blue was placed upon the wall, and daily charmed visitors to the greenhouse.

On the whole, Anne enjoyed her new duties very much. Of course, there were hard days, when the weather was

oppressive, and to pick and group the flowers tedious, or when business was dull. But as to the latter, such days were now few. At first only Hillstead people came. They approved of Anne's energy, and independence, and wanted to help the Seaburys who were more valued than they at all suspected. But knowledge of Anne's handiwork spread. People began to come from neighboring villages as they never had in the many years that Miss Dana had kept the one greenhouse in Hillstead.

"Have you seen those 'Anne Seabury flower baskets'? They're said to be the most enchanting things!" Anne's proud father heard one lady say to another in the street of an adjoining town. He walked straighter the rest of the day, and cherished the remark for his wife's ears.

House-party decorators appeared at the modest little greenhouse, quite startling its owner. Anne's fingers had to fly to keep up with her work. In two months her pay was doubled, and in three Judith Faxon came in every day after school to assist. She proved an apt little pupil.

"I should think you'd have more pride than to work in a greenhouse!" said Trix to her little sister.

"I guess if Miss Anne does it, I needn't be ashamed," said Judith angrily. "What's there to be ashamed of, anyway?"

"Real ladies don't work in stores or greenhouses," said Trix, aggravatingly, and holding her blonde head high.

"One does, anyhow, and I wish I could be just like her."

"Stop, stop, girls!" said their mother. "Beatrice, you are very silly."

Mrs. Seabury had a small income of her own. Her husband's pay, though modest, was regular. And Anne's earning soon became a decided addition. Each of the family tried to be cheerful for the sake of the other two, and Uncle Hiram's dire investment was never mentioned.

The mutual anxiety as to ways and means had drawn mother and daughter even nearer together. Each became less reticent with the other; and one evening, when Mr. Seabury was away, and Anne and her mother were upstairs in the latter's room, Anne told her of Mr. Moores' proposal and her own refusal.

"I didn't really love him, mother," she ended.

"Then I'm glad you said no," said Mrs. Seabury. "You were right. I had hoped—but you did just right. I've seen such awful trouble come when people tried to blind their eyes to the truth, and to twist their consciences about so that they might wed in spite of not having the real kind of love. No material good can make up for that kind of bruise to one's spirit."

Anne looked into her mother's honest eyes, and knew she was right.

"If only Mrs. Dove wouldn't ask questions!" she said ruefully.

"She isn't worth minding," said Mrs. Seabury. "Besides, I don't believe she'll come here again for some time —(not if I can help it)" she added to herself.

Miss Dana often gave Anne a few flowers to bring home to her mother. Mrs. Seabury, who dearly loved flowers, held now in her hand a little cluster of heliotrope. She divided it, and then, almost shyly, and with

unwonted color rising in her cheeks, put the little flowers into her daughter's hand.

"Your father and I are not in a hurry to lose our girl," she said.

They went downstairs together, Mrs. Seabury's arm about Anne. Mr. Seabury came in from outdoors just as they were descending. He noticed with some surprise the unusual evidence of their affection, and something that had lain like ice upon his heart melted away, leaving a quiet content. Anne, with joy, saw his face wear its old familiar look of cheer.

"It's good to get you back, father," she said tenderly.

CHAPTER XVII

TREACHERY

Mr. Moores was taking a letter to the Hillstead post office. It was a letter of many pages, and as he walked slowly along the village road he read it over. The letter was to his far-away friend, Hugh Westerly, and long-delayed as it had been, was an outpouring of all his hopes and aspirations. It had been written just before his evening with Anne of which I have told you, and he wrote of her greater ease and confidence with him, of her unflagging interest in the new school house, which was to mean so much to him; and now, with all the ardor of a man deeply in love, he wrote of her goodness and sweetness, and of how he should cherish this jewel, if only it might be his very own.

The letter perhaps carried more confidence than he actually felt. It had been pleasant to put his dreams on paper. But after the signing of his name came a pathetic little postscript:

"She has refused me," it ran, "and I see that her refusal is final. I wish I were out there with you, old man."

These added lines were destined never to meet Hugh Westerly's eyes. Mr. Moores finally put the letter back in his pocket with several others, or rather he thought he did so, but the missive, in fact, slipped from the rest and

was left lying by the roadside. On reaching the post office, Mr. Moores took from his pocket the bunch of letters without looking at them, and dropped them in the box. He had an appointment nearby with his architect, and fearing to be a little late, hurried away.

Now somewhat behind the schoolmaster Trix and Judith were also on their way to the post office. Trix's quick eyes saw the letter drop from Mr. Moores' hand into the roadside grass. She gave a glance at her sister, wondering if she also had seen the letter fall, but Judith had been looking another way. A number of Academy boys were playing ball in a field hard by. How to secure the letter! for this Trix was instantly determined to do.

"Judith," she said, "run over into the field, and tell George that dinner's going to be at noon. The boys make such a racket he can't hear me if I call."

"All right," said Judith, scudding across the road. And Trix, darting forward, seized the letter and tucked it in her bosom. A gleam of delight came into her eyes as she saw the address. She was intensely curious to know what Mr. Moores had written to Mr. Westerly, and her desire was much stronger from her having the other evening seen the schoolmaster seated near Anne in the late moonlight.

Trix was engaged to Dick, but whether she married him would depend on whether a more desirable match came her way. To wed the rich schoolmaster would best suit her ambition, but even her shallow little mind grasped the unlikelihood of his ever succumbing to her advances. Hugh Westerly, though much less desirable, was still worth consideration. How the Hillstead girls would

envy her if she secured him, and became a minister's wife. Nobody should go to sleep at her parish meetings.

Trix thought it extremely probable that Mr. Westerly would come back next summer to stay with his sister during the vacation. Then would be the time for her to put in her work—if only Dick didn't come around too often, and stand in her way. But there was Anne, tiresome creature! However, she would read the letter.

I don't know whether any faint glimmering came to Trix of the enormity of what she was doing. It was certainly unhesitatingly that, while Judith lingered in the field to watch the ball game, she drew the letter out, and opening the envelope with one of her hairpins, hurriedly read the sheets.

The postscript was compensation for the lover's praise of Anne in the earlier part of the letter. Obeying a shrewd impulse, she carefully tore off the added lines, and, replacing the letter in its envelope, managed to seal it again. She resolved to mail it at once.

So in due time the letter reached the far western city where Mr. Wseterly was already doing valuable work. On reading it, Hugh felt more sure that he had done right not to stand in his friend's way.

I know my reader may be impatient with him, that she may wonder at his not guessing something of the truth. It is much harder to paint his portrait than his friend's. Mr. Moores' worth and charm were accompanied by a buoyant optimism and outspoken geniality that were magnetic. Mr. Westerly's talents were not so obvious, being obscured by a natural strong reserve and occasional depression of spirits. He was extremely modest in his

estimate of himself. But side by side with his invaluable ministerial work ran a line of scientific experiments that were already bringing his name to the attention of noted geologists, not only of this country.

More than once Gwendolen had read proudly to Anne a paragraph from some paper or scientific journal alluding to the increasing value of the work of this newly discovered star in their firmament.

Hugh's love for Anne was imperishable. When he read Mr. Moores' letter, breathing confidence in every line, his own sky darkened; but he only gripped his work the harder. And fortunately, double interests filled his time to overflowing.

Poor Trix! She was like a baby that believes if only it reaches its arms high enough it can grasp the moon. It might have done her good if she could have seen Mr. Westerly's look of contempt as he crumpled up and tossed into the waste-basket a small pink missive received by him about six days later.

"Dear Mr. Westerly," her letter began. "You will be surprised to hear from me, but I don't want you to think we have all forgotten you away off here in Hillstead. Some of us have our mind pretty well occupied, to be sure. I guess Mr. Moores and Anne Seabury are among the number. It's said they are engaged, and I must say it looked as if they were the other night when I saw them sitting close together on the Seaburys' front porch."...

Hugh scorned Trix's letter, and yet it left something of the effect it was intended to have,—left an all-too-clear picture of Anne and the schoolmaster, sitting together in the moonlight. It seemed impossible to tear open his

wound yet further by writing to Mr. Moores. And, indeed, there was no hurry.

When midsummer came he wrote Gwendolen that he had decided to stay on in the West. "I am up to my ears in important experiments, and I fear they will call for all my spare time at present. I enclose a London letter in answer to the last article of mine. They want me to go over in the fall, but of course that is for some time out of the question. My church has first claim. The country around here is great for my tours of investigation. One of my Sunday school boys, a first-rate little chap who has lately lost his mother, goes on all-day trips with me, and we have become great friends."

The boy was not the only friend Hugh had made in his new surroundings. In many a home acquainted with affliction he was a frequent and welcome visitor. Especially in the humbler homes was he often found, quietly lifting the weight of sorrow from some mother's heart, or holding in his arms a little one left an orphan. He did it all so unobtrusively, and as a matter of course!

"Bless him!" said one mother with breaking voice, who had just lost a lovely baby girl, "It would be a black world without him! What did we ever do before he came!" Young men brought their perplexities to him. But of all these things, little was heard in Hillstead.

Trix went on quarreling and flirting with Dick. Some said he was growing tired of her.

Anne's days were busy ones in the greenhouse and at home. Gwendolen's life, too, was full with her many activities and social obligations. She was the means of a special great good to Anne. Coming unexpectedly to

the Seaburys' one day, she heard Anne playing softly upon the piano. Even though the instrument was an inferior one, and not lately tuned, it was unmistakable to her that the girl had real talent. She listened outside some time before going in. The girl's touch was exquisite, as she played some quaint Scotch airs, and then a little spring song.

Next day Anne received a note from Gwendolen saying Hugh's piano—a beautiful one—had long stood idle. The tuner just employed told her it was far better for the instrument to be constantly used. As she herself never played a note, would not Anne oblige her by making use of the piano? She could practice on it in any spare time. Her own evenings were a little lonely without Hugh. Couldn't Anne come and play for her two evenings a week? She would, of course be glad to pay for this pleasure. And she named a generous sum. To Anne, quite stirred by this happening, the obligation seemed all on her own side, but Gwendolen insisted upon paying her.

Sometimes Trix saw Anne hastening up the long walk that led under the trees to Miss Westerly's door.

"Great Scott! before I'd hang around with a woman when a man made of money was dying to spend the evening with me. Anne Seabury certainly is the limit!" So Trix thought; and many of the young women in Hillstead would doubtless have agreed with her.

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM DARK TO LIGHT

"I know the night is near at hand,
The mists lie low on hill and bay,
The autumn leaves are dewless, dry,
But I have had,—have had the day.
Yes, I have had, dear Lord, the day;
When at Thy call I have the night,
Brief be the twilight as I pass
From light to dark, from dark to light."

J. Weir Mitchell.

Under the sunshine of a completely satisfying friendship, Anne's character grew, and her happiness deepened.

An arrangement was made with Judith so that Anne was able to leave the greenhouse an hour earlier every day to practice on the Westerly piano. Hitherto she was mainly self-taught, except for six months' music lessons when a little girl of ten. But now from her earnings she was able to take a fortnightly lesson from Mr. Strang. He was delighted with his new pupil, and often spoke to Gwendolen of her unusual power of expression. On first reading a composition, even if unable then to play it rapidly, she always caught and reproduced with rare delicacy the composer's own feeling.

Gwendolen found herself refusing invitations that would interfere with the hour of the music lesson, when she dearly loved to sit in a room near-by and listen to the

sweet sounds. Once in a while she stole to the open door to look in for a moment. Anne in a simple cotton gown, her blue eyes full of feeling, was such a picture as she played, Gwendolen wished that Hugh might see and hear.

And how about Hugh? Could Anne be happy through this long, unbroken silence? I don't know exactly how it was, but that she was content I do know. It was almost as if in having the sister, the brother was brought close. Certain it is that Gwendolen liked to talk of Hugh, and to read aloud scraps of his letters. If she observed the deepening color that would come at such times to the face of her quiet listener, she spoke no word that could embarrass Anne.

On Sunday afternoons they took long walks together, and there was no wood or meadow path round about that they were strangers to. All weathers knew them, from the bright spring days when cowslips smiled at them from the sunny meadows, to the days enjoyed no less when their cloaks were whitened by driving snows, and the nipping air quickened their steps.

Sometimes Miss Westerly had visits from friends of earlier years, friends nearer to her through their girlhood years together than Anne could be. Anne missed her friend at these times, but there was no bitterness—how could there be?—and she knew the dear companionship would be hers again.

One day when Anne came to practice, Gwendolen met her eagerly, an open letter in her hand.

"Oh, my dear, what do you think! Hugh has received such an honor! His last geological paper was so fine, so

valuable, that he has been made an honorary member of the London Geological Society; and—let me see—yes, this very night he is to be the guest of honor at a dinner given by Englishmen visiting this country. The dinner is in L——, a city about ten miles from where he lives. Read this newspaper cutting. It says he's the youngest man ever admitted to the society."

Anne had never seen Gwendolen so excited. Her own emotions made her stiller than ever, but she smiled joyously. Gwendolen would not allow her to go at once to the piano, but took her upstairs to her own room to hear the letter from beginning to end.

Momentous day! At this very hour Hugh, in his California home, was reading another long letter from Mr. Moores.

"Why do you never write a chap?" it ran. And there followed pages of Hillstead doings, and of the conveniences and beauty of the new schoolhouse. Finally, near the close of the letter came this:

"I wrote you long ago of Miss Seabury's refusal. It was a good bit of a blow, as you can imagine. Something in her face the other day when I was speaking of you—Have I been the blindest of the blind, old man? Come home and find out. Let me be your friend, as you have been mine." And then he turned to other subjects.

But Hugh didn't even see the closing lines. A fire of excitement such as he had never in all his life experienced possessed him. The pent-up feelings of months would no longer be checked. A heavenly picture flashed upon his mind. Had he, indeed, been the most confounded fool that ever lived? Go home? Wouldn't he go home? And,

in fact, what was to hinder his starting at once? It was the beginning of the summer vacation. His investigations were completed, his possessions few. An hour would suffice to pack his trunk.

His amazed landlady hardly knew her dignified boarder when he burst in upon her, saying, with shining eyes, "I'm going home, Mrs. Bradford! I shall start in an hour's time."

"But your supper, sir?"

"I shall eat in the train," he called back exultantly from the stairs, up which he was already springing.

"Lord love us!" said Mrs. Bradford, unaccustomed to such sudden flights. "Ministers are that queer!"

Hugh packed at lightning rate, consulting his watch at intervals. He would telegraph on to Gwendolen from the train's first stop. Plenty of time for her to prepare his room—in fact, she had more than once assured him that his room stood always ready for him. What a sister she had always been! But to see Anne, Anne, Anne!—

"Mr. Westerly!" Mrs. Bradford shrieked after him, as he sped down the street, "Mr. West-er-ly! Here's your penknife."

"Give it to the paper boy!" he called back, not looking around.

He got to the station barely in time to see to his trunk and secure his ticket.

"What happened to the parson, fellers?" asked a lanky man on the platform, as he watched Mr. Westerly spring onto the train. "Looks to me ez if he'd come into a fortune."

It was hours to the first stop. Hugh ate a deliberate

supper to take up the time. He tried to read a magazine, but Anne's face with its eyes of enchanting blue, looked out at him from every page. He shut his eyes to see her the better. After an eternity of time, the train slowed up at B——, and Hugh sent his telegram to Gwendolen. "On my way home. Be with you Saturday noon," it read.

"That's surely to his wife," thought the girl operator, seeing his beaming face.

The train heaved a sigh, and pulled its long length from the station. Hugh again settled himself in his seat. A baby half-way down the aisle was fretting and the young mother looked tired and discouraged. Hugh brought them water to drink, and the baby stopped its crying.

Suddenly Hugh sat upright, with a look of comical dismay upon his features. The Geological Dinner! In his honor! And he fleeing it, as fast as steam could carry him! He composed a telegram of vague apology, for which an august circle of gentlemen never quite forgave him.

"Stay with me tonight, dear," said Gwendolen, after receiving her brother's telegram. "I can't spare you. I must have you to talk to."

And Anne stayed. They ate their supper on the porch —creamed chicken, graham muffins, delicious crimson strawberries and yellow cream.

Anne never forgot that evening, with its talk of Hugh. The friends sat in the soft twilight with its breath of honeysuckle long after the dishes had been removed. Gwendolen told Anne much of Hugh that she had never heard before—of his childhood, when he was by turns so

serious and so gay, of his boyhood, when the hope of being a minister dawned early upon his mind—of all that really lay under his quiet exterior, and that made her so proud to call him brother.

Anne was glad the fading light hid her face. She wondered who the figure was coming up the road. He lagged at the gate, as if loath to come in.

"Isn't it the boy who brought the telegram?" she asked Gwendolen.

"Yes, I think it is. Perhaps Hugh put off starting. I thought it strange he chose the very day that dinner was given him."

The boy looked rather frightened. "For you, Miss," he said in a low voice, handing Miss Westerly the yellow envelope. "They said I was to tell you it was bad news."

"Come into the house, Anne," said Gwendolen, in a voice she tried to make natural. They went into the lighted study; Gwendolen's hand shook, but she read the telegram aloud.

"Train accident. Your brother killed instantly, without pain. Everything done. Will be brought home."

Their arms were about each other, and they clung together like children lost in a dark forest. An immense grief enveloped them.

In Hugh's pocket was found the first lines of a letter to Anne: "Darling Anne—let me call you that once, even if you never let me again—I am coming home, and I must see you soon. Do you remember . . ."

To Anne ever after, the little piece of paper, charred and torn, and the writing almost illegible, was a priceless possession.

CHAPTER XIX

DISILLUSION

Five years had gone by, and Trix was now Mrs. Richard Allison, and lived in one of the new somewhat pretentious-looking brick houses in the more thickly-settled part of Hillstead.

Dick tonight was returning from a two-days' business trip, and as he walked up the street and neared his own house, a small girl, hardly out of babyhood, came running to meet him. She was very dark, almost swarthy in coloring, with no vestige of beauty except her babyish plumpness. Dick, absorbed in thoughts of his own, took her small hand in his, but hardly noticed her, except to scowl as he saw that the little frock she wore was torn, and by no means clean, and that she was chilled and insufficiently clad.

"If you can't keep that child decent when she goes on the street—" he began in a loud, angry voice as he entered the house, but then stopped, seeing that Trix was not alone. She rose from the parlor sofa, laughing artificially, but her color did not deepen as she said:

"Here's Mr. Rheinfrank come in to see us, Dick. Run right upstairs to Jane, you dreadful little imp!" pushing the child toward the door. "I'm sorry you should see her this way, Fred. Her nurse is absolutely no good; I shall have to let her go."

Mr. Rheinfrank, who sat upon one end of the sofa, and whose face was extremely red, laughed sheepishly. He was a short, stout, flashily-dressed man, and Dick, who was tired and wanted his supper, eyed him with hardly concealed disfavor.

The room looked as if it had not seen a broom for some time, as indeed it had not. A clutter of dressmaking was upon chairs in one corner. Perilously near the edge of the piano's dusty top was a plate of chocolate layer cake. The brocade curtains of peacock blue hung unevenly.

"I suppose I can find something to eat in the pantry," said Dick in a surly voice.

"I hope you notice my husband's charming manners," said Trix. "There may be something in the ice box, or there may not. You never said you were coming tonight."

"Well, I like that! I wrote you a card yesterday morning!"

"Oh, so you did. Well, go along, and find what you can. You should have got supper in the station, coming late this way."

"You bet I will next time," said Dick, leaving the room. "Hello Judith!"—almost running into Trix's sister in the front hall. "The kid's upstairs, if it's her you've come to see."

"Yes," said Judith, "but let me fix you some supper first. You haven't had any, have you?"

"No, but don't bother."

But Judith, seeing his tired face, insisted, and he was glad to drop into a chair and rest, while she quickly toasted some bread, and heated the remnants of a beef pie.

"Here's the tea," placing a little silver pot near him," and arranging the various dishes conveniently. "Now you'll eat much more restfully if I leave you in peace, so I'll run up to Mab."

"All right. Thanks. See she puts on a jacket or something, will you? She's caught cold, I think. Say, wait a minute, Judith. How often has that chap been coming around, do you know?"

"I don't know," she said noncommittally, and hurried away upstairs to the so-called nursery, a forlorn untidy bedroom, which a slatternly girl shared with the child.

Judith with difficulty restrained herself from venting the displeasure she felt at Jane's neglect of her charge. She knew it was not her place to say what the nurse should or should not do. But though Judith compressed her lips, and did not speak to Jane, who sat reading a novel, the girl knew she was displeased.

"That child's forever slipping out of the room," she said. "I only took up this book the minute before you came in—," putting it on the bureau as she spoke, and smoothing her apron.

Mab ran to her aunt, and climbed up into her lap, snuggling her tear-stained little face against Judith's shoulder. Judith drew her close, rubbing the small chilled hands.

"First you tella 'tory," said Mab, an' nen I tella 'tory."

"All right," said Judith; and she repeated a Christmas tale she used to like as a child. It ended with a description of the Christmas tree, with gifts and oranges and candies hanging upon it.

"Now I tell one," said Mab. "Oncea was a little girl,

an' she was orful hungry, an' she cried for her supper, an' a nice kind lady gaved her candy an' ice cream an' bread an' butter an' 'leven mugs of milk 'n"—

"Mab," said Judith, "have you had your supper to-night?"

"No," said Mab with a half sob, looking in a frightened way toward the nurse.

"There! It's the first time I ever forgot her supper," said Jane. "It was this way, Miss Faxon. Her ma says to me—"

But Judith had gone from the room, and in a few minutes was back again with a plentiful supply of bread and butter and milk.

"I didn't find any ice cream or candy in the ice chest," said she, "but I'll bring you an orange tomorrow, darling. Jane," she could not resist adding to the nurse, "do you know how bad it is for a little child to go without her food? I shall have to speak to Mrs. Allison about it."

"Speak to her all you want to," said the girl pertly. "You wouldn't if you'd heard what she said to me yesterday. 'I wish she'd stay home, and not be running my house,' she says."

"You can go downstairs," said Judith. "I'll give Mab her supper."

With some smothered impertinence the girl left the room, banging the door after her.

Judith drew forward a low table, and arranged the child's supper on it. She added three pink rosebuds from the greenhouse in a little doll's pitcher.

There was a strong physical likeness between Mab and

her aunt, and Judith might easily have been thought to be the child's mother.

When the supper was eaten Judith undressed Mab, telling her as she did so another merry little story. She sat a little while beside the child's bed, but not talking, and Mab, her small brown hand in Judith's outside the coverlet, fell asleep almost at once. Nor did she waken, although she stirred uneasily, when at last from downstairs came the sound of loud and angry voices.

Judith withdrew her hand cautiously from the little girl's, and went quietly down the stairs, thinking to leave the house unobserved. But Trix's eye caught her as she was about to open the front door, and she sprang toward her with a look that almost frightened Judith.

I am not going to repeat the stream of invectives that fell from Trix's lips. Judith had grown pale before she had done, not so much from fear as in indignation, and Dick had stepped reassuringly to her side.

"From now on you keep clear of my house!" Trix ended furiously. "I won't have you dancing attendance on my husband, and spoiling Mab so she has no use for her own mother!"

"And I tell you to come whenever you want to," said Dick. "Shame on you, Trix! It isn't a month since she was nursing our child through scarlet fever. She's earned welcome in this house forever, and you know that as well as I do. The doctor said Mab would have died but for Judith."

His face worked and he went back to his chair. Judith, without a word, slipped out of the house. As she went

quickly down the road, she heard Dick's and Trix's voices growing louder.

"Perhaps I have interfered, mother," she said, talking it all over at home with Mrs. Faxon, "but it just breaks my heart to see that dear little thing so neglected. What can I do?"

"I'll try to get her up here for a long visit," said her mother. "Trix will be only too glad to get rid of the care of her. Oh, Judith"—bowing her head in her hands—"it's an awful thing! I'm sure I don't know what Beatrice is coming to."

In the Allison home a storm was raging.

After wrangling about the child, they had suddenly returned to the earlier matter of dispute, the frequent calls of Mr. Rheinfrank.

"He's pretty quick sometimes," said Dick, "but he was not quick enough this time. I saw him taking his arm from around your waist when I came in. Laugh if you want to. You won't either of you laugh long. I've stood just about all I'm going to, and so has my child."

"I'd like to know what either of you is going to do about it," said Trix tauntingly. "You have only yourself to blame. I thought I'd married a smart business man, but you're an old stick-in-the-mud. Your salary's just where it was four years ago!"

"Blame yourself!" shouted Dick. "You took away the finest chance that ever came my way. I'd be having three times what I get if I'd taken Hathaway's offer."

"That's you," said Trix, "always putting the blame on somebody else! It was a black day for me when I married you! You don't do a thing to make life interesting for

me, and if somebody else does, why, you've yourself to thank. Why don't you go out and call on Anne Seabury?"

"Just leave her name alone," said Dick in a different voice, and Trix for a moment was silenced.

There was a hurried step on the stair, and Jane appeared in the doorway with a frightened face.

"Oh, Mis' Allison," she said, "you'd better come—or her father. She's got the croup again! She's took bad!"

"I'll get the doctor," said Dick, and was out of the house.

Trix stepped to the telephone. "1505-W. Is that you, mother? Mab's got the croup again. Tell Judith to come right over, will you? Tell her to hustle!"

Then she went upstairs. She was the only one in the house who got any sleep that night. But the child was better by morning, thanks chiefly to Judith's wise and vigilant care.

CHAPTER XX

THE LOVELY MIRACLE

"There shall never be one good lost! What was
shall live as before." ROBERT BROWNING.

Gwendolen Westerly's most intimate friend, Leslie Yale, had been making her a long visit, of which the last day had come. As a final pleasure, Gwendolen was entertaining this morning a small gathering, with folk dancing by Hillstead children.

Anne played for the dances on her piano. For on Hugh's death his sister has given his beautiful piano to Anne, and instead of having it moved to her own home, she preferred keeping it in its accustomed place in Gwendolen's parlor.

This spacious room was well adapted to the folk dances; and Leslie Yale's face lighted with pleasure as she watched the children in their simple frocks of gay colors, tripping about the floor, with the prettiest, jolliest looks exchanged, and shy glances toward the onlookers at the end of the room.

Anne sat at her piano—her piano and Hugh's. My heroine is several years older. Her figure has broadened slightly, but she is by no means stout. The dark hair and blue flowerlike eyes are unchanged, but the face if older, is even lovelier than before, through the deeper experiences. People still differed as to her looks, but those who

formerly called her a pretty girl now said she was a beautiful woman.

Judith Faxon, who stood by the piano turning Anne's leaves of music, was her devoted worshiper. Her yellow gown contrasted charmingly with the simple unadorned white worn by Anne—unadorned except by some violets fastened in her belt, and the narrowest black velvet ribbon tied about her neck.

In theory Anne had disapproved of wearing mourning, but when Hugh died she found it impossible to wear bright colors. They hurt her. So, although she avoided entire black, as it would have made her too conspicuous, she usually wore something like the slender ribbon.

As she played the spirited air for the folk dances, she smiled across the bobbing children at Gwendolen and Leslie Yale. Jealousy was a thing no longer possible to her. A truer form of friendship had driven it out, burnt at its very roots. And Gwendolen smiled back lovingly at Anne.

"How exactly right she plays for the dances!" she said to Leslie, "never forgetting that the dancing is the principal thing."

"Her modesty is certainly one of her greatest charms," said Leslie, "and is shown in her accompanying. I never heard a more exquisite touch."

"Her teacher, Mr. Strang, says she is really an artist. But somehow it has been hard to get the stupid people to realize it. There is a pushing, commonplace but showy music teacher here who, without an inkling of Anne's gift, ropes in three-quarters of the children in the towns about as pupils. It makes Mr. Strang very indignant. He intends getting up a little class for Anne himself, and

he is recommending her more and more as an accompanist."

"How beautiful she is! Look at her now while that little boy is speaking with her. What fun in those blue eyes? What a blue! Gwendolen, you never told me Miss Seabury had such eyes."

"Didn't I? They are very lovely. And she is all she looks."

"Is the schoolmaster as devoted as ever?"

"Oh, that died out long ago. Not that they aren't the best of friends. But, didn't I tell you? Mr. Moores married Jessie Dewey over a year ago."

"He did? Gwendolen Westerly, you don't write me half of the Hillstead news. You are a very bad person."

"Yes, he married Jessie, and they live most happily in that great gray stone house on the hill. You should go through it. It is a dream of a house! He lured over one of those noted English country-house decorators."

"I suppose they're are rich as Croesus."

"Yes, they are; and the best of it is, so wise in their spending. They are very charitable, but not foolishly so. Their chief interest is to aid young people who are without means to get an education. One of Mr. Moores' former Academy boys, John Morton, is, entirely through him, on the straight road to becoming a landscape painter."

Their attention was fastened on the children again, who were now beginning a pretty dance, "The Barberry Bush."

That afternoon was, as usual, spent by Anne in the greenhouse. On getting home to supper, she found Mrs.

Dove sitting in the dining room, while her mother was bringing in the savory dishes from the kitchen.

Anne felt a little dismay at seeing Mrs. Dove. She was unusually tired. The day's weather, following our New England fashion, had been variable. Delightfully cool during the morning, by afternoon a sudden sultriness had descended upon the land. Clouds were gathering.

"Do open the note!" was Mrs. Dove's sole greeting, as Anne entered the room. "A man brought it early in the afternoon from the Moores. It's in his writing. I'll bet the baby's come! I told your mother to open it, but she wouldn't."

Anne tore open the envelope, which was addressed by Mr. Moores. Inside were feebly penciled words from dear Jessie herself: "Twins, Anne dearest—Anne and Hugh."

Anne was beside herself with joy. "Oh, how perfectly lovely!" she cried. "Oh, mother, did you hear? Jessie has twins. A boy and a girl. One is named for me, and the other"—her voice choked.

"What's the matter?" said Mrs. Dove. "Have you forgotten the boy's name already? The boy's Hugh. Likely that's his father's name. Or no, I do seem to recall there was a Hugh Dewey way back. Wasn't it Jessie's great-great uncle?"

They did not enlighten her at that time, though they knew that Westerly would be the middle name of the baby boy. Mrs. Dove had never known, nor ever would, of the love between Hugh and Anne. As they seated themselves at supper, she began, as she had done countless

times before, to lament Jessie's having won the prize that so easily might have been Anne's.

"If you'd had any proper sense of duty, you'd be today mistress of that splendid palace of a house, instead of slaving away teaching children to play that have no more music in 'em than toadstools."

Usually Anne would turn aside Mrs. Dove's remarks, but tonight she was rather overtired. Tears rose to her eyes. She forced them back, but before long excused herself, and went upstairs. It was so trying! Really, she supposed that when she herself had grown to be an old woman, Mrs. Dove would still be talking in the same vein, still scolding and bitterly lamenting.

She determined to banish it all from her mind. "I'll go to see Gwendolen," she thought. "It's beginning to rain, but what do I care?"

She enjoyed the rain. She was hardly on her way when it came down harder, and might even, indeed, be called a storm. She was glad she had put on her rubber coat. The road almost at once lay between racing rivulets, the branches of the trees were shining. Oh, it was good to be in the heart of it! It was a cleansing deluge, bearing away all despondent thoughts and leaving a sense of exhilaration. A sweet tremulous bird note from some deep-hidden nest came to Anne just as she reached the Westerly house.

Gwendolen, meanwhile, sat alone at home. Leslie Yale had gone, but she expected two friends in to pass the evening. She drew the curtains, and lit the lamp with its rose-colored globe.

Presently the telephone rang.

"I'm so sorry, Gwendolen dear," said a voice. "I fully meant to come tonight, but it is raining so hard—"

"You mustn't think of it," said Gwendolen, trying to keep her disappointment out of her voice. "Some other evening will do just as well. Have you seen the new Atlantic? Did you read—"

Janet would come anyway. Janet liked raspberries. And she had saved some of the big cool berries which her friend would have with cream and powdered sugar. She would arrange them herself, on her prettiest tray, the one Hugh gave her so long ago.

The telephone again.

"Oh, Gwen, my dear, the sky is positively dropping out. I'm so tempted to come—but, really, it is such a rain—"

"You mustn't dream of stirring out," said Gwendolen. "It's a night for ducks only. But be sure to come soon. There is so much to talk over—"

Then Gwendolen went out to the kitchen, where Norah was putting away the last of her supper dishes.

"Oh, Norah, they're not coming, neither of them!"

"Oh, did you think they would, Miss Westerly, an' it coming down cats and dogs like this?"

"I wish I'd asked Miss Seabury over. I believe I will now. But no, it is too much of a storm."

Norah smiled suddenly. She had seen a figure hurrying up the path, struggling with an umbrella as she came. The wind was rising, and the branches of the trees rocking wildly.

"Did I hear the door bell, Norah? I'm not sure. Let me go this time. You're busy."

When Gwendolen opened the front door, Anne was fairly blown into her arms.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "you're as welcome as flowers in May!"

Regardless of Anne's wet cheeks, she kissed her. The warmth of the welcome was such joy that Anne for a moment could not speak. Norah, broadly smiling, came forward to take the dripping coat and umbrella. "Ye're a bould wan for the shtorrums, Miss Anne!" said she.

"Oh, Norah, I love them!" cried Anne. "And I was so wrapped up I'm not a bit wet. Thank you."

"Bring in the little tray, please, Norah," said Gwendolen. "Who would ever have supposed it could grow so cool, after such a sultry afternoon! It is like October now. Sit here, dear." And she drew forward a low, wide-armed chair beside the fireplace. "I'm going to make you the prettiest fire you ever laid eyes on. No, don't stir! Do as you are bid."

And Gwendolen deftly laid some dry twigs with some pine cones among them, and a spicy-smelling, moss-covered log atop. Before sitting down beside Anne, she added a piece of treasured driftwood, from Nantucket.

"There now!" she said proudly, as the whole sprang into warmth and color.

"It is beautiful!" said Anne, sighing contentedly, as she held her hand to the blaze.

Then Norah came in with the little tray, holding the raspberries and cream and two cups of hot chocolate. When the cups and saucers were empty, Gwendolen said, "Shall we go on with our book? It is just the night for a good read"—to which Anne heartily agreed. They

loved the old books, and were now in the midst of "Villette." They read by turns for more than an hour, and then, after replenishing the fire and turning off the lights, talked in the firelight, which flickered rosily upon the wall opposite them.

They talked of Hugh. To do so had been a great comfort to both ever since his death. But tonight their talk of him was more intimate than it had ever been before. Anne went back to her afternoon with him in the wood, so long ago, when he had poured out his heart about his sister Alice. All he said then was stamped upon her memory. And she told Gwendolen how he had spoken of death. "The only way to take it is like a hard examination," he had said. "Keep the mind clear up to the last moment, concentrate on other things, and then it all comes easier than we had expected. The puzzling questions find answers at the right time."

Gwendolen's eyes were dim. "Oh, Anne," she said, "it is a comfort to have his own words about it. I am realizing more all the time that it is the quality, not the length of one's life that counts. So many letters have come to me from the people he worked among in California—such pathetic little misspelled letters, some of them!—and all showing the help and comfort and inspiration he gave. You and I may well be proud of Hugh, dear Anne."

They were silent for some time: Anne put her hand into her pocket, to let it rest there upon the little silken case. Within the case lay a bit of torn and charred notepaper with Hugh's writing. Again, as in that long-ago day in the wood, she felt a sense of vigorous comforting

life that was Hugh's direct giving. It was almost as if he were with them again.

"As I look on into middle age," said Anne at length, "I think it a much happier time than childhood or even youth. I wonder how you feel about it?"

"It depends largely upon the person, I think," said Gwendolen, "but I feel as you do; only I think to enjoy the best of any stage of life we must keep a good deal of what comes before—the child's enthusiasm, for instance. Life comes out in clearer colors as we go on, and is much more interesting."

"Yes. When one is a child it is like being on a pony —a pony that wants to dance and jump and play. It is good enough fun; but then after a while one likes to sober down. And now it begins to be like driving a good, steady, friendly horse—there is a chance to look on either side and really see the country one passes through. I know I shall like it best of all. I've got more used to my pesky self, and know better how to hold the reins, and when to use the whip."

"Someone certainly ought to sing the praises of middle life," said Gwendolen, "but you are very young to be talking about it. Childhood and youth have had more than their share of the poet's ardor."

"Why, when I was a little girl," said Anne, "I was the most miserable little thing! Children keep so many griefs and discomforts hidden. We are not so proud as we get older, and so sympathy can reach us. Isn't that one reason why we are happier?"

"I think so. But why shouldn't we be happier, if we grow? Only that we lose some of those nearest to us."

"It is all very strange and mixed-up," said Anne. "We can have heavy sorrows, and yet be happier, on the whole, than before they came. More is called out in us to meet them—perhaps that is it."

Before the evening ended, Anne went to Hugh's piano, and, still in the firelight, played some of the pieces she knew Gwendolen loved and part of Schubert's Symphony in C that had been Hugh's favorite. She felt a warm glow of happiness. The rain suddenly ceased and the swaying boughs stilled, as if the trees were listening to the sweet sounds. The scent of roses came in through the windows.

I wish I could show you Gwendolen Westerly as she was to Anne this night. Who can describe the flower's perfume, or the tremulous tenderness of the bluebird's note?

Gwendolen had an utterly indescribable charm, and the charm was much enhanced by her own unconsciousness of it. She bore herself proudly; but somehow that made one love all the more the times when her manner changed to one of winning sweetness. She was big-hearted. And it was this generous attitude that was part of her gift for drawing other people together, and getting them to show their very best. If you went to her drooping and out of spirits, before you knew it she had acted upon you like the reviving sunshine at the end of a dark day.

Some people have different manners according to the class with which they happen to be thrown. Gwendolen's courtesy was as delicately sure for the woman who cleaned her house as toward the finest lady who came to call.

Does it seem to you a very tame and quiet pleasure of

Anne's to be sitting thus with her friend in this country house? I have told you a few things that made a part of the bond between Gwendolen and Anne, but in any such relation there is much that is indefinable. Who can say why, of two persons with whom we are thrown, equally fine, equally praiseworthy, we feel but a quiet respect for the one, and each moment's contact with the other is a vivid delight? Such a being "in love" is not to be scoffed at. It is a lovely miracle. The scoffers are those who are themselves incapable of very deep feeling, or else confound the real steadfast emotion with its cheap and fleeting imitation.

To Anne the so-called little things had always been the big ones: to walk out into the garden and see the first blue larkspur an event, to watch the earliest snowflakes on the window pane a greater delight than some much-talked-of happening. She had kept, in an unusual degree, the spirit of the child—could still feel wonder over a sunrise, still be thrilled by Nature's daily round of events. And if these were by no means little things to her, and never lost their freshness and charm, how ever new and marvelous and beautiful did she feel it to be alone, as now, with her chosen friend!

Marriage with Hugh would have brought to Anne what is, perhaps, the highest form of human happiness, but it was a deep compensation to have the love of his sister. It was a wholly clean and unselfish affection that she had for her woman friend, and the relationship was constantly opening new doors, breathing fragrance, and giving fuller life. It demanded no first place, or exclusive privilege. It was "a thing of beauty" that, with

Hugh's memory, would "never pass into nothingness." It would be to her "a joy forever." That was what all Nature seemed to say to Anne as she made her way home along the quiet Hillstead road, where the trees and the grasses on either side stood joyfully erect in the sweet summer air, filled with new vigor from the rain.

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